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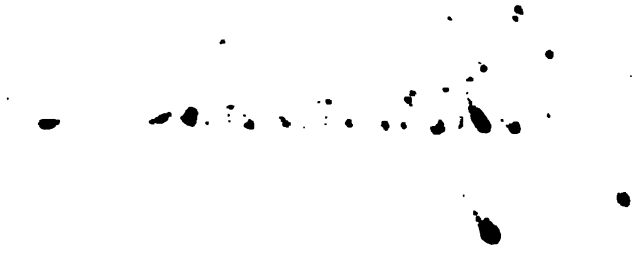

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THE GENTLEMAN

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THE OLD SCHOOL.

CHAPTER I.

The relation between the moral and physical universe is so close; man's being and his fate are so linked to all the material objects that surround him, that, when I remember one of the speculative visions of my youth, which I looked upon in after years as nothing but an idle folly, I find that it may be true as an image, though it be false as a fact. The fancy I allude to was, that there is a sort of involution of soul and body, one within the other, throughout all nature, each moral agent composed of many parts, comprised in its material form, each acting upon, and suffering through, the other. Man, according to this hypothesis, had his soul, with all its various feelings, comprised in the earthly tabernacle of his mortal frame; the earth, with all its mass of manifold material qualities and capabilities, was but the body assigned to the great existing mass of human intellect and feeling, which, in the aggregate, was in fact the soul appointed to animate, to employ, and to govern it. The planetary system in which we move, as a speck in the ocean of space, was another body animated and impelled along its destiny by another spirit, and was in itself comprised within some other great series of material and intellectual parts, forming another great body, and another great mass of mind, and so on, till the whole was embraced in infinity of power, of might, and of wisdom. Fancy also had suggested

many a cunning contrivance to reconcile discrepances, to remove obstacles, to palliate absurdities; and, in the light wanderings of a young imagination, I have often asked myself, why may not this be?

An answer has long since been found, and with these passed-by dreams of my early days I have nothing more to do here than to choose from among them such images as may best be suited to my present subject, believing, as I do, that all the feelings, thoughts, and passions that affect the human mind, may find, in the material world around them, types of themselves and of their effects, while the changes of the seasons, the movement of the hours, the transitions of light and darkness, spring, summer, autumn, winter, day, twilight, night, and dawning, the cloudless sky, the passing shower, the storm, the tempest, and the earthquake, have each their counterparts in the mind and fate of man, more or less in the history of each individual, and always in the history of the world.

A young and unperverted mind sets out in early youth with fair prospects, with a happy disposition, with indulgent parents, and wealth at command, and for many a bright year all is smiles and gayety. Pleasure leads on to pleasure, till comes satiety: disappointments begin to appear, the trusted friends prove false, the hopes break like bubbles that a child would grasp, prosperity passes away, impatience, anxiety, intemperance succeed; the spoiled child of fortune bears ill the check of adversity, and new difficulties and reverses rush up to swell the amount. Violent passions, anger, wrath, strife come on; and life either ends in turbulence and crime, or else, improved though saddened, elevated though melancholy, the rest of existence is spent calmly, cheered by the hopes of another and a better world.

How like is this history to the passing of many a summer day! It rises bright and beautiful with all the promises of splendour, of sunshine, and of light; the birds sing about the cradle of the infant morning, the painted insects hum around and flutter as it rises; cloudless in its golden prosperity it advances through the sky, till towards the heat of noon a cloud or two here or there comes with its shadow over the heavens. Ardent and more ardent the noonday sun shines strong, as if to overwhelm such intruders in its tide of glory: but the very heat seems but to call up fresh masses of dull

vapour: they rise, they increase, they grow upon the sky, the warm summer light but makes them look more black and threatening, till at length the sun itself is covered, and the storms begin. Then comes the lightning, and the thunder, and the hail; the brightness and the beauty are all passed away; the calm light of the dawn, the golden warmth of the morning, the resplendent beaming of high noon, are all gone; and the day either comes to an end in clouds, and storms, and weeping darkness, or else, after many an hour, the blue sky appears again, the vapours are partially swept away, and with tearful eyes and aspect cool though clear, the day goes down into night, leaving the hope of a brighter morrow. Such is the sort of day with which we would fain open this true history.

Nothing could be fairer or more beautiful than the morning when, towards nine o'clock, a young gentleman set out on horseback from an inn about ninety miles from London. It was a fine and handsome horse that he bestrode, and, as far as features and form went, he might be pronounced a good-looking young man. We cannot, however, say as much for the expression of his countenance; for though nature had given him features, each of which was good individually, the union of the whole was not so pleasant, and the sneering sort of self-confidence about the lip, as well as a considerable degree of supercilious insolence in the brow and eyes, produced altogether a look which few could meet without feeling an instant inclination to resist and to repel. The complexion was fair, almost to effeminacy; the features straight, and the colour that which is produced sometimes by deep study, sometimes by enfeebling dissipation. He rode well, and set off at a quick pace; and the servants of the inn, who had collected round the door to see him depart, indulged in various comments as he rode away, which perhaps might not have gratified him much to hear.

"He'll not catch the carriage though, for all that," said the hostler who had held his horse, "and a good thing too, for I'm sure some of those in it didn't want his company."

"He doesn't want to catch the carriage," said the waiter. "I've seen him before, two or three times, and I'll take any bet that he'll stop his horse half way on this side of Stalbrooke turnpike. Ay, ay, I know what he's after; but it won't do."

Thus saying, the waiter turned upon his heel with an air of knowing importance, and was followed by the chambermaid, who made sure of wringing the secret out of him before long; but two or three of the rest remained watching the stranger up the road, and commenting upon him till he was out of sight.

This stranger, however, we must now follow upon his journey through the rest of a day which was not destined to end so fairly as it had begun. He proceeded a long way at the rapid pace at which he had left the inn, without looking to the right hand or to the left, and seemingly buried in his own contemplations; nor did he pull in his rein till, after riding about an hour and a half, he saw, as he reached the top of one hill, a carriage drawn by four horses slowly ascending to the top of another, at the distance of about a mile and a half or two miles. He then brought his horse to a walk, and for the first time looked up towards the sky, the aspect of which had completely changed since he commenced his journey.

Dark, leaden clouds by this time covered three quarters of the sky with a variety of fantastical forms, all hard and cutting at the edges, except where some lighter mass of grayish vapour floated over the general surface; and at the same time, beyond the hills over which the carriage was wending, was seen one broad expanse of deep lurid purple, with two or three small thin streaks of fleecy white drawn across it.

As the horseman gazed, a sudden sharp line of wavy light ran across the dark bosom of the distant cloud; and, setting his teeth hard, with a look of mortification, he muttered to himself, "A storm coming on; this is disagreeable enough."

Now, abstractedly speaking, there are few things, if any, in all that portion of the universe which is exposed to the eyes of man, so grand, so mighty in beauty, so magnificent in splendour, as a great thunder-storm. The feeble and impotent contention of man with man, even upon the grandest scale, is fain to borrow from the cloudy war of the storm images to give it grandeur. We hear of the thunder of the cannon, of the lightning flash of the artillery. But what is it all to the reality, when forth from the cloud bursts the deafening voice of the storm upon the ear, and upon the eye blazes the blinding flash of the leven bolt of heaven? When

shall we produce lights like that, casting their splendour from one verge of heaven to the other? where shall we find sounds so magnificent, so grand, rolling along the whole vault from the zenith to the horizon? Yet there are few persons who view a thunder-storm with the same feelings; and, indeed, the differences of human character are tried by scarcely anything more finely, than by the sensations produced upon the mind by that phenomenon. There are many who are terrified, and that terror may proceed from a thousand other causes than mere mental weakness. There are some who have been taught fear irremediably in their youth. There are some actually afraid of corporeal danger. There are some scarcely afraid, but awe-struck and overpowered. There are others, again, who have neither fear, nor awe, nor admiration, the dull fabric of whose minds is incapable of any fine sensation. There are some who do more, and admire the storm, but admire it simply for its grandeur: there are others who do so likewise, but go far beyond; who combine it with visions of bright things, who hear tongues like those of angels in the voice of the thunder, and who gaze upon the blaze of the lightning, lighted by its splendour to far faint visions of Almighty power and majesty.

It was not with the latter sensations at all that the traveller, whose course we are pursuing, beheld the approaching storm. He had no fear, it is true; he was even capable of admiring the beauty of the spectacle, if it did not interrupt, delay, or inconvenience him. But he had no thought beyond that; his mind had not a tendency to rise; it was not one of those that form out of everything in nature a fresh step to elevate and ennoble themselves. At present, therefore, as he was abroad, and with an object in view which required him to ride some distance so rapidly as not to suffer the time employed to be perceived by others, he looked upon the approaching storm as an annoyance, simply as it was likely to impede him in the execution of his purpose. The sight of the carriage also had annoyed him, as he evidently did not wish to come up with it, and the road by which, as the waiter had shrewdly divined, he intended to turn off, lay beyond the brow of that hill over which he had seen the vehicle of his friends slowly proceeding.

Forced, then, to slacken his pace, he descended the

hill at a walk; and seeing a little green lane, which led away to the right, beaten with the marks of horses' feet, and channelled even by the ruts of wheels, he convinced himself that it would lead him by a shorter way to the point whereunto his course was directed. Accordingly, turning his horse's head, he once more put him into a quick pace, and rode along till he was interrupted by a gate which he found some difficulty in opening. The air was extremely sultry, and, while struggling to open the gate, a few drops of rain began to fall, precursive of the approaching storm.

With a sharp, splenitive oath, the horseman tore the gate open and rode on, taking no pains to shut it behind him; and yet he began to doubt that he had taken a right path. A multitude of alders were growing on the one side, and a swampy field of osiers appeared on the other, running down to the bank of a river; and recollecting that the high road passed that river by a bridge some way on the hither side of the turning which led him in the direction he sought to take, he began to fear that he should find no way across the water, and that the road only led to some farmhouse or to some fields at a distance from the highway. Checking his horse, he was on the eve of turning back, when some sounds, as of people speaking on the way before him, again led him forward to inquire his way; and scarcely a hundred yards from the spot where he had checked his horse to turn, a sudden bend of the road showed him a wide common opening out before him, with a little brick bridge over the stream. The sounds he had heard proceeded from two boys driving some cattle; but a way over the stream being thus afforded him, he fancied that he required no farther directions, and accordingly rode on at the same quick pace.

Two or three distant claps of thunder had been heard as he passed along the lane; but, immediately after he had crossed the bridge, a bright flash of lightning startled his horse so as nearly to throw him, while the rain began to come down heavily, mingled with large hail stones, which drove right in his face as he took his way across the common. It was impossible now to go fast, at least for one not well acquainted with the way, for the road half lost itself in the turf of the waste, and was only to be distinguished by the occasional tracks of wheels, which were often so deep and irregular as

to make his horse stumble more than once, while the hail continued to pour directly upon their path, nearly blinding both beast and rider.

There are some people who fancy that their way must be smooth through life; and, having a high opinion of their own deserts, look upon all the little misadventures and obstructions of existence as injuries with which they have a right to be discontented, angry, and impatient. The traveller before us was one of such; and could any one have looked into his mind, or forced him to give sudden voice to all that was passing in his bosom, they would have found that he was as angry, as impatient, as much irritated, as if some mortal hand had done him an act of injustice, or offered him a glaring insult. Internally he cursed the weather; he vowed that it was always so; that whenever one wanted half an hour's sunshine, a storm was sure to come on; and that the day seemed to have changed on purpose to disappoint him.

Which way he was to go, too, soon became another question of difficulty; for half way across the moor the wheel-marks by which he had guided himself spread out into two different directions, and no friendly finger-post pointed its long white arm to show him the path which he was to follow. Just at that moment, however, the quick sound of a horse's feet galloping behind him caught his attention; and the next moment a young gentleman, about his own age, mounted on a splendid hunter, bending down his head to avoid the hail, and seeming to trust entirely to his horse's knowledge of the way, passed him at the full gallop.

The bewildered traveller shouted after him in a loud voice, and, though carried beyond him for nearly a hundred yards by the impetus of his horse's speed, the other drew up his horse and turned to answer his call.

"I have lost my way on this common, sir," said the first traveller we have mentioned, "and know not where to betake myself in this storm."

"Oh! come with me, come with me, then," replied the other, in a frank voice; "we shall find a place of shelter in a minute; follow as quick as you can. There is a house not a quarter of a mile on."

Thus saying, he again turned his bridle, and put his horse into full speed; and the other, somewhat disconcerted at not having been treated with any very formal

respect, quickened his horse's pace, and followed as fast as he could.

Galloping over the common towards a clump of trees which formed a conspicuous landmark, the leading horseman entered a lane between two hedges, and in a few minutes was at the door of a small, neat brick house, standing at the edge of a little sandy slope, with a pond and some tall elms overshadowing it a little farther down the road. He sprang to the ground instantly, the door was thrown open with impatient good-will by a clean-looking maid-servant; and exclaiming, "Quick, quick, Jenny, get me the key of the stable-door: I shall spoil my uncle's saddle-cloth and his demipique," the young gentleman led round his horse to a small stable at the side of the house, and had safely housed him before the other came up.

"You had better put your horse in here too," he said, on the arrival of the person he had guided, "and then come into good Dame Philippina's till the storm is over." This said, he turned once more to the maid-servant, who had run out with the tail of her gown over her head to open the stable-door, adding, "Do, Jenny, wipe the demipique, and dry the saddle-cloth: there's a good girl. I took them because all my own saddles hurt the new horse's back."

"That I will, Master Rafe, that I will, with all my heart," replied the girl. "But, Lord bless you, sir, it's not hurt; and Sir Andrew wouldn't mind if it were, so you hurt it."

"That's the more reason I should take care of it, Jenny," replied the young gentleman. "Now, sir, if you will come with me," he continued; and, running across the little open space, he entered the door which the maid-servant had left open.

Standing in the passage, which was as clean as hands could make it, and very nicely sanded, was a person who seemed somewhat anxious to show the young gentleman every sort of kindness, and upon whose personal appearance we must pause for a moment. She was a woman of about five or six-and-forty years of age, with a complexion which can be called nothing but coffee colour, somewhat black under the eyes, and not a little shrivelled; but, nevertheless, with features by no means ugly, and a somewhat pleasant, though, if we may use the term, unsettled expression of countenance. Her teeth

were good; her hair, which was the colour of a raven's wing, had not one single filament of white marking the approach of age. The eyes were as black as jet, extraordinarily lustrous and flashing; and, though not very large, yet the whole space between the eyelids being nearly occupied by the iris, they seemed of greater dimensions than they really were. She was small in person, apparently very active and well-made; and altogether, though dressed in a style suited to a person even more advanced in life than herself, Mistress Philippina was a very pleasant-looking person, though it needed not to be a great physiognomist to read in her countenance the traces of an impetuous and passionate disposition. To gaze upon her face, it would have been very difficult to say to what race or country she belonged. One thing, however, was apparent at the first glance: she was not an Englishwoman. She was, perhaps, more like a middle-aged Frenchwoman from the neighbourhood of Marseilles or Avignon; but the moment that she spoke, her tongue belied that appearance, and a strong German accent, which she had never been able to get out of the bottom of her throat, at once declared her country, though she was so unlike in person the generality of its inhabitants.

"Well, Mistress Philippina," said the young gentleman, taking her good-humouredly by the ear; "well, you must give me shelter till the storm's over, and this gentleman too, whom I have met half drowned upon the common."

"That I will, Master Ralph," replied the other; "but I'll go and get you a little warm elder wine, for you are both of you as wet as may be."

"I don't want any, my good Philly," replied Master Ralph, as she called him; "but I know, if you say I'm to take it, it's inevitable. If you were to tell me I was to take pap, such as you gave me when I was a baby, I know I should be obliged to do it."

"Pap! I never gave you pap," cried the woman, shaking her hand at him; "why you were four years old when I came to you, and a wild scapegoat you were."

"Scapegrace you mean, Philly," replied the gentleman. "But get the wine, if it must be so; only, if you will let me have my own way for once, let it be cold, not hot; for who could drink hot wine on such a day as this? I dare say the thunder has turned it all sour."

"Nonsense," cried Philippina. "Thunder does no harm to anybody but fools and small beer;" and away she went upon her errand, fully resolved that the young gentleman and his companion should not only have the wine, but have it hot too, for she was one of the few women who love their own way.

When she was gone the two horsemen had time to turn and remark for a moment each other's appearance. The first we have already described. The second was a very opposite person in almost every respect. He was of a middle height, well and gracefully made, strong and muscular, even more than he appeared at first sight, and the whole aspect of his person betokened at once vigour and activity. His countenance was remarkably handsome, though very dark; his eyes large and of a deep hazel; his teeth fine and regular, and the expression cheerful and good-humoured; though there was a great deal of thought about the brow, and a glance of quick and fiery energy in the bright lustrous eye. He was dressed in a green riding-coat, relieved by a binding of silver lace, and had on a light riding-sword, in a shagreen sheath with silver mountings. His feet and legs were covered with heavy hunting-boots, coming above the knee, such as were worn at that period; and his hat had a band of white feathers, a piece of *petit-maîtrism* which had been very common about thirty years before the period of which I speak, and which was revived for a short time within the recollection of our fathers. His manner was frank and open, but, withal, that of a person who was accustomed to be treated with respect, and who felt that all around him owed him at least some degree of deference.

The dress of the first horseman, of whom we have spoken, was somewhat different; it had the air of the town about it. The chocolate-coloured suit, the manifold buttons, the rich embroidery of the waistcoat, the profusion of lace, the quantity of shirt shown at the wrists, all spoke plainly the inhabitant of the great metropolis; and he, on his part, had quite discarded from his hat every vestige of a feather, and contented himself with a broad gold band and buckle, very much like those which we have now transmitted to our servants. The dresses of both were pretty well soaked in rain; but, as might naturally be expected, that of the Londoner had suffered the most; and, notwithstanding the

advantage of a good person and gentlemanly bearing, he certainly did present at that moment a very draggled and disconsolate appearance.

After a momentary pause of examination, in the course of which the gentleman whom they had called Master Ralph regarded the other so intensely as somewhat to excite anger, he said, in a tone of apology, "I really have to beg your pardon for staring at you so, if I am not correct in believing we have met before. Your face is not altogether strange to me, but it seems connected with very distant years. I could almost swear that it was my old schoolfellow John Forrest."

The word instantly seemed to call up new feelings in the bosom of the stranger also, and he answered, "The same, the same! If I did not know that Ralph Strafford was in Germany with Prince Ferdinand, your appearance, and the place in which I find you, so near his uncle's house as this must be, would make me believe that you were he."

"I am none other, Forrest," replied his companion, extending his hand to him in a frank manner, though there had been something strained and involved in his companion's acknowledgment of recognition. They shook hands heartily, however, Ralph Strafford adding, "I have returned from Germany more than six months. Everything seemed to promise so speedy a termination of the war, that I might well be spared; and my uncle, who had a fit of illness at the time, was anxious for my presence in England." Their first recognition was followed by a temporary fit of musing.

It is strange—perhaps the strangest of all the mind's intricacies—the sudden, the instantaneous manner in which memory, by a single signal, casts wide the doors of one of those dark storehouses in which long-passed events have been shut up for years. That signal, be it a look, a tone, an odour, a single sentence, is the cabalistic word of the Arabian tale, at the potent magic of which the door of the cave of the robber, Forgetfulness, is cast suddenly wide, and all the treasures that he had concealed displayed. Upon the memory of Ralph Strafford rushed up the visions of his youthful days; the sports of boyhood, the transient cares, the quarrels soon forgotten, the pains which passed away like summer clouds; the pure, sweet joys of youth, and innocence, and ignorance of ill, that never return when

once passed away. The image of John Forrest was connected with bright and happy memories, and it was natural that all the first feelings of his schoolfellow on their recognition should be pleasant towards him. It required a more slow operation of memory to call up many a disagreeable trait in the character of his companion, and even then a generous heart was fain to believe that the faults of the boy had been corrected by the experience of the man.

While they were yet with this subject fresh upon their lips and their thoughts, the good German Philippina returned with her neat maid-servant bearing the mulled wine; and Strafford's first exclamation was, while he did more justice, than inclination for the beverage prompted, to the wine she brought, "I have found an old schoolfellow here, Philly. Forrest, let me introduce you to the worthy gouvernante of my infancy. Frau Philippina Weiler, let me introduce to your notice my old schoolfellow, John Forrest."

Philippina fixed her black, sparkling eyes upon the stranger, and made him a low reverence; but, before she could answer, the young gentleman went on, "Why, whither were you going, Forrest, in this out-of-the-way part of the country, when I met you on the common? I cannot consent to your quitting our county without spending a day or two at my uncle's, who will be delighted to see you."

"To say the truth," replied the other, after a momentary pause, "I was following the carriage of my uncle, who is going on with his wife and daughter to spend a short time with his cousin, Lady Mallory. But this storm coming on, I thought I could take a shorter cut across the country, and had lost myself when you found me."

"To Lady Mallory's!" exclaimed his companion, with some surprise; "I never knew that she was your relation. She must be much younger than your uncle."

"A great deal!" replied John Forrest; "not much older, I believe, than myself. There was some unfortunate dispute between them, which lasted for several years; but it is now made up, and he is going down to visit her for the first time since her marriage. He was to have set out three weeks ago, but he was detained in London."

"It is strange enough," replied Strafford: "I have

just come from the Hall myself; but I fear your uncle is not aware that Lady Mallory is very ill, and unable to see any one."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the other, with much surprise; "that is most unfortunate."

"The report was," said Strafford, "when I called this morning, that she was somewhat better, and hoped to see any of her friends again towards the end of the week."

His companion replied not, but fell into a fit of musing; and Philippina joined in the conversation, shaking her head, and saying, "Ay, it is a sad, sickly time, Master Ralph; a sad, sickly time, indeed. There's many a poor soul badly now."

"I know it, I know it, Philippina," replied Strafford, with a saddened brow, "especially in the low grounds down by the moor there. The summer has been so wet that it has spread much sickness. I was just riding down to see poor Williams, the schoolmaster, and inquire what could be done for him, when this storm came on, and I turned down here for shelter."

"Ay, Master Ralph," replied the good woman, shaking her head, "the storm has spared you a useless ride; nothing can be done for poor Williams now in life. He died about this time yesterday. I went down and sat with his poor girl for an hour or two, to comfort her last night; for the gay, blithe, wild-headed thing is now wellnigh broken-hearted."

"You're a good creature, Philly," replied the young gentleman. "I fear Williams has died but poor, and his girl must be badly off."

"A beggar," replied Philippina, briefly.

The young gentleman's purse was in his hand in a moment. "She must want nothing, Philippina," he said, "till my uncle can do something for her. Go down to her again to-night, there's a good woman, and let her have everything that is needful. Let her think my uncle gives it, you know, for she might not like to take it from a young man like me."

"Thou art thoughtful and kind, my boy," replied Philippina; "always thoughtful and always kind, and I will do what you bid me; but I hope and trust that there is another that will take care of her, for sure I am there is another loves her well, wild and light as she has always seemed. If a man have a generous

spirit, it is now that he should come forward to sooth, and cheer, and bless her sorrowful heart with generous kindness and honest love, when the first natural affections that God put in her bosom are mourning over her father's grave."

There was something in the woman's words that touched Ralph Strafford much, and he turned to the window as if to look out to the sky.

The storm had somewhat abated; there was a gleam of blue and of sunshine upon the edge of the horizon; and in about half an hour more the cloud seemed to have exhausted its fury and passed away, though there were still drops of rain falling from time to time, and now and then a flash of lightning, followed by a distant murmur of the thunder, broke across the landscape, but faint and subdued. The two gentlemen then mounted their horses; and Strafford, promising to put his companion into the direct road to Mallory Hall, led the way back through some other lanes towards the high road. Forrest suffered him to do so unopposed; for though, as we have seen, he had falsified the truth in attributing his deviation from the turnpike road to the effects of the storm, yet, whatever was his purpose, it was abandoned for the time, and he willingly put himself under Strafford's guidance.

CHAPTER II.

We must now lead our readers to another scene, very different from the high road, or the wild common, or the clean, deal-boarded parlour of Philippina's cottage. It is to the library of Stalbrooke Castle, such as it was in the days of which we speak. Many an eye that looks upon these pages may have seen it in its present state; but that state is very, very different from the condition in which it was then found.

It is a very common saying in many parts of this pleasant little island of old England, when things go well with one, that "the world runs upon castors with him;" and, in a wider sense of the word, the world has certainly run on castors between that time and this,

changing everything as it went along; castors as rapid and eager in their revolutions as those which, nowadays, upon a railroad seem to beat the flight of Time himself, and find the clocks striking the same hour in many a different part of the earth.

In the library of Stalbrooke Castle in those days there were no damask hangings with gold fringe; no chairs of red morocco, so heavy in their massy carving that they could hardly be moved; there were no splendid looking-glasses in frames of a foot in thickness; but, nevertheless, everything bespoke comfort, affluence, and taste, though chastened by a calm simplicity. The chints curtains, the neat, light-rolling armchairs, the soft Turkey carpet, the large, well-contrived library table, were all prolific of as much ease as the best and showiest of more modern inventions. There was a grandeur, too, in the large black oak bookcases, with their folding glass doors, which displayed the titles on the tomes behind without suffering the dust to encumber their quaint old bindings; and the formidable array of volumes, eight or nine thousand in number, had, at first sight, an imposing effect, though, perhaps, afterward there might be a strange shade of melancholy come over the mind, from a vague feeling, connecting the immensity of labour, and thought, and study, which must have been expended in the compilation of that mass of literature, not only with the idea of the mortality of those who produced it, but with the idea of the mortality of man's best and finest hopes of his aspirations after fame and permanent renown, and with that of his vain grasping at the straws which float upon the surface of existence, in the expectation that they will save his name from sinking like the rest. A great library is certainly a splendid monument to intellectual exertion; but, like other monuments, it is as certainly erected to the dead, and bears a touch of the melancholy of the tomb; with this only difference in general, that the book-shelves are the catacombs in which are entombed men's minds instead of their bodies.

On the top of the bookcases, contrasting finely with the black oak of the panelling, were a number of busts of celebrated men in white marble. The execution of those thus placed was not very good; but around the room, on pedestals of different kinds of rich marble,

were some exquisite pieces of ancient sculpture. They were few, but they were choice; and on no part of the statue or the bust was there to be seen the mallet-mark of the manufacturer of modern antiques, nor the clumsy additions of the restorer's chisel.

Some large, splendid, but cool-coloured china vases filled up various intervals; and it is worthy of remark, that the only things around the room which in the slightest degree approached to the yellow hue of gold, were the castors of the chairs, a thin moulding round a large pier-glass over the mantelpiece, and the massy carving of two old Florentine frames; in each of which, on either side of the mantelpiece, was placed an exquisite specimen of the handiwork of two of the most opposite, yet most skilful landscape painters that ever lived.

There was on the one side a cool, calm, shady wood-scene of Poussin, with a boy gazing into a stream, which was scarcely rippled by a distant fall over a small rock. There was but little in the picture, but one might look upon it during a hot summer's day and feel refreshed.

On the other side was a picture of the same size, from the hand of Claude, full of sleepy sunshine, and representing a bright soft world basking in the risen day. In the midst of December, in gazing upon that picture, one might well be deluded into believing that the ear heard the busy hum of the insects in the pride of summer.

Such was the appearance of the library of Stalbrooke Castle at the period of which we speak. But there was something else therein upon which we must pause, in order to give even a more lengthened description. It was the owner of the house, who, seated in an arm-chair by the side of the library table, on which his left arm leaned, was reading, with calm thought, one of the periodical papers of the day; not one of those journals, indeed, which, filled with virulence, malevolence, and falsehood of every kind, give excitement and food to the bad passions of the present time, but one of those short essays, by which some of the wisest and best of the men of the last century endeavoured to improve the hearts and enlarge the understandings of their fellow-creatures.

The gentleman we speak of was apparently about

sixty years of age, or somewhat more; but hale, healthy, florid; with an undimmed eye, an unwithered cheek, a lip as firm and full as that of youth itself. One saw that he was advanced in life, but yet one could scarcely point out in what particular age made itself visible. He was tall and well made, without the slightest approach to corpulence; and the swelling of the muscles of his leg, seen through the nicely-fitting silk stocking, spoke a life of activity and vigour. His hand, which had one ring upon the little finger—a small, plain circle of gold, like a wedding ring—was remarkably white and well made; and there was a degree of extreme neatness and care in every part of his apparel, which is pleasing to the eye to behold in every period of life, but more especially at an age when all the fopperies of youth are done away with, and we are too much accustomed to neglect that personal appearance to which we formerly paid too much attention.

His hair, which, probably, could the colour have been seen, would have been found to be white, was filled with maréchal powder, the reddish hue of which harmonized well with his florid complexion. He was a little bald about the temples; but over the rest of the head the hair was full, and tied with a black riband in a large thick club behind. His coat was cut much in the form of those which are still worn at courts, and was made of an excessively rich and thick sort of silk, resembling uncut velvet. It was perfectly plain, however, and of a sort of tea-colour, only relieved by some large steel buttons, not very much cut. His waistcoat was of white, plainly embroidered with brown; and his breeches of the same colour as the coat, with one pocket, in which he kept his snuffbox, habitually open, as if he feared not to get at the precious weed rapidly enough.

It must be owned, however, that he took very little, and that very rarely; but underneath the snuffbox lay his purse, and that was often in his hand.

His buckles in the knees and in his well-made shoes were of the same plainly cut steel as his buttons; but it must be acknowledged that, in the silk stockings of blue and white (of what was called the thunder and lightning pattern), in their fit, their spotlessness, and the avoidance of every wrinkle, there was a degree of neatness which approached to foppery. Let my readers

take the pencil of imagination, and draw him as we have described him, only adding the steel hilt of his sword—he was never without it, for he looked upon it as the especial mark of a gentleman—with the steel hilt of his sword, I say, reposing quietly in the left-hand corner of the chair, where it had fallen naturally when he sat down, and they will have before their eyes a picture of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, a true gentleman of the old school, as he sat in his library at the hour of ten o'clock on the morning, the commencement of which we have already described.

It has not come to my knowledge what was the precise paper that he was engaged in reading. It was before the commencement of the Rambler, we believe, and after the conclusion of the Spectator. But it matters not, for it was evident that whatever the essayist might say gave him pleasure. Sometimes he dropped the paper a little from his eye, and gazed forward thoughtfully, as if either to impress upon his mind that which he read, or to examine more minutely the truth and accuracy of the sentiments expressed. Then, again, as he read, and when some unexpected sally sparkled from the page, or some happy point was suddenly elicited, a well-pleased smile would play upon his lip, somewhat peculiar in character, and even benevolent; for it seemed as if he were not only satisfied with what had been said, but as if he participated in the author's pleasure at having said it so happily.

His was a heart, indeed, that was in constant association with the hearts of his fellow-men. Most men are selfish entirely in almost everything they do: the pleasures they derive are for themselves; the pains they experience are for themselves; the thoughts they think are of themselves alone. Even if they act apparently for the benefit of others, it is for advantage or honour to redound to themselves; and the one little godhead of self is the object of their worship through every hour of the day, though they veil the idol under a thousand garbs.

But the reverse of all this was Sir Andrew Stalbrooke. There was a link of connexion, as we have said, between everything that he did, or thought, or felt, and the actions, the happiness, the welfare of others. As we have just exemplified, when he sat down to read the

productions of any other man, if they were well written, his pleasure was doubled on the author's account; if they were ill written, he felt pained and grieved for him, and found in the treasures of his own generous heart a thousand excuses for the failure, which he never would have brought forward had the case been his own. That he lived not up to his income was neither from a love of money, nor for the desire of leaving any larger fortune than he himself possessed to his nephew and his heir; but he always considered and foresaw that the moment might come when some extraordinary claims might require the surplus, and some one who wanted assistance might have it but inefficiently if he went close to those bounds of due economy which he was resolved never to overstep. His forethought in this respect was constantly justified, for that which was saved one year never remained in his purse till the end of the next.

That he kept up fully and splendidly the household, the hospitality, the table, and the equipage of an English country gentleman, was neither that he loved ostentation or fine living; but he recollected that the multitudes of the laborious, the ingenious, the industrious, receive their legitimate support from the wealth of those to whom God had intrusted large property, even as stewards; and he felt that he had no right to disappoint their just expectations of employment and reward. The poor and the needy, however, always found that his purse remained sufficiently full for their necessities, and his generosity was of an ample character.

Strange as it may seem, there can very well be such a thing as a mean generosity; a generosity which gives but half as much as may be really serviceable; and this, in almost every instance, produces to the object of it evil rather than good, depresses rather than raises, entangles more deeply instead of setting free at once.

Such, however, was not the generosity of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke: when he gave, his first thought was how much may be really serviceable, and what he gave was certainly never less than what his judgment pointed out to be ample. He was generous of his time too; for, a happy economist both of riches and moments, he could afford to give the necessary space for investigating the truth of any case that was brought before him, for seek-

ing the best means of relieving distress, for interesting others where his own aid could not be fully available, and for soothing, comforting, consoling, and advising in those instances where neither wealth nor interest could prove a medicine to the mind's malady.

He was generous, too, of his reputation, for in reputation also he felt himself to be rich. He never shrunk from the persecuted, he never abandoned the innocent, he never frowned even upon the failing and repentant. Many a man would have been trodden under foot by the rush of slanderous enemies; many a woman would have been cast from society, and plunged into vice as the only resource, had it not been for Sir Andrew Stalbrooke. His hand had been a prop to many, his name had ever been a shield to the oppressed; and, as it cannot be in this world but that a crushed viper will turn to sting, the sword of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke had twice sprung from the sheath to defend the wronged honour of others who trusted their cause to him.

We have not painted the mental character of the Gentleman of the Old School so fully and completely as we have his personal appearance; because on the latter we shall touch no more, while many a trait of his character may have to be recorded in the pages which follow. When he had done the paper which he was reading, he laid it down and rang the bell. The servant was some time in coming; and as Sir Andrew had in his character several little foibles, one of which was a certain degree of impatience and quickness of disposition, he rose and took the bell in his hand hastily, as if to ring a violent and reproachful peal. But such movements were with him but momentary; and, even while the rope was in his hand, he corrected himself, and rang again as gently as before, thinking, "Johnson is most likely busy, and I know he does not like any of the others to answer my bell."

A moment after his own servant appeared, bringing two or three papers in his hand. "I beg pardon, sir," he said, "for keeping you waiting; but here is one of the poor little boys from the village that used to go to Williams's school. Poor Miss Lucy has sent him up with all these papers, that her father desired to be given to you concerning the school business."

"I knew you had some good reason for not coming

directly, Johnson," replied Sir Andrew: "I am afraid poor Williams will not do well."

The man shook his head. "He died yesterday, sir," he said: "I knew it last night, and thought to tell it you while you were going to bed; but you were grieved about Lady Mallory's illness, and I could not find it in my heart to vex you."

"You should have told me, Johnson, you should have told me," replied the baronet, calmly. "We are not here to see all things prosper that we wish, Johnson, and every man must bear his portion of sorrow. God knows, I have had very few of my own as yet, and I wish to be spared none of the natural pains that must befall us, not for an hour, Johnson. Poor Williams! he was a good creature, though his head turned with poetry and such things out of his way and above his station. Lucy will be very sad, poor thing. We must see what can be done for her. Give me the papers. We must get another schoolmaster soon, or the poor children will be getting quite wild again. Tell the boy to give my love to Lucy, and say I will be down to see her in the course of the day. Hark ye, Johnson! if you were to go down yourself, and tell her that though she has lost one father she will find another in me, it might comfort her till I can go down, which I will do after the post comes in."

The man bowed and retired, and Sir Andrew advanced to the wide bow-window of the library, and gazed out for several minutes. It was a beautiful scene that he beheld, the ground sloping down from Stalbrooke Castle, green wave after green wave, till a long avenue of horse-chestnuts marked where the park wall ran along the bottom of the valley. Beyond that again rose up a sunny landscape, breathing of rural prosperity, extending for many a mile, and bounded only by wooded hills at the distance of two or three leagues. Between, lay field beyond field, with cottages innumerable, marked out and separated from each other by groups of trees and shrubs; while little gardens, small detached fields, hedgerows and copses appeared, growing less and less distinct, till all was lost in undistinguished masses. Beyond the park, though the village was hidden by the horse-chestnuts, the scattered cottages and farmhouses could all be seen clearly among the trees; here and

there a whole front, then a gable, then a roof, then nothing but a few chimneys, with the white smoke curling among the green leaves. The whole was bathed in sunshine; and through the open window came mingled many a sweet country sound; the distant barking of the honest dog, the gay voices of the village children, and the singing of many a bright bird, glorying in the fulness of summer. It was all very lovely and very delightful. But even in the enjoyment of that sweet scene, Sir Andrew Stalbrooke's sympathies for his fellow-beings were not for a moment extinguished. He thought of what that sunshine must be to her who mourned; and, as he turned away towards the writing table, he said, in a low voice, "Poor Lucy."

He now seated himself to write letters, and continued to do so for nearly an hour; but, as he went on, though the apartment was wide and lightsome, the paper grew dark, and, as he sat, Sir Andrew could scarcely see to write. Without looking up, he changed his position so as to gain more light; but, in a few minutes after, there came a sudden flash of light across the paper, and then a peal of thunder that shook the whole building. Sir Andrew now looked up, and saw the rain descending fast; then applied himself to his letter again, and wrote on.

He had just concluded, and was folding up what he had written, when a servant in livery entered, and, advancing close to the table, said, "Sir, there is a servant just come up from the hill to say, that one of the horses of the carriage with which he is travelling has fallen going down the hill, and the carriage is overturned. His master, and mistress, and all the rest are under the great ash-tree by the milestone, and they want assistance to set the carriage to rights."

Sir Andrew instantly started up. "Under the ash-tree in such a storm as this!" he cried. "Quick, John, bring all the men that you can get down directly. Bring down all the cloaks, and roquelaures, and things of that kind that you can find. We must have these ladies up to the castle immediately. They must be strangers, or they surely would not serve me in such a way as this."

"That's what I said to the servant, sir," replied the man; "I said you would be quite offended."

"Not offended, John, not offended," replied Sir Andrew; "but hurt, pained, grieved."

"I sent down William, sir," continued the man, "and Thackery, the under-groom, along with the servant, and I told them how vexed you would be; so most likely they are coming up by this time."

Notwithstanding this intimation, however, Sir Andrew pursued his way out of the library, through a little vestibule, into the great stone hall, which was separated from a large flight of stone steps leading down into the Gothic porch of the house by a screen filled up with glass and admitting two large glass doors. Hastily taking up his hat and cloak, he threw open one of the doors; descended the stone steps; only paused in the porch to bid the servant who followed lose no time; and then, running down the other flight of steps with the agility of youth, he passed through the stone court, as it was called, which led at once to a short paved road which brought him to the highway.

At this moment, hail, thunder, rain, and lightning were pouring a mingled deluge on the earth, so that it was scarcely possible to see any object, even at the short distance which lay between the gates of Stalbrooke Park and the spot upon the side of the hill where the carriage had been overturned, Sir Andrew could just perceive, through the dim, dark curtain of the heavy shower, one of the huge masses, called coaches in those days, lying flat upon its side like a black sow in the mire, with a group of several persons gathered together under a large ash-tree near the spot, which, in truth, afforded no shelter whatsoever, while the three men who had just before gone down from the castle were seen a little nearer, each running on with his head bent down in the attitude of a ram in the act of butting, in order to encounter the hail and rain upon what was probably the thickest, hardest, and most impenetrable part of their person.

The baronet hurried on as fast as he could, and advancing at once to an elderly gentleman, who seemed the master of the vehicle, he announced his name, and begged that the whole party would immediately take shelter in his house. With the rapid clearness which distinguished most of his proceedings, he cast a single glance upon the carriage; and seeing that one of the

axles was broken, he turned again to the gentleman before he could even announce that he accepted the invitation, exclaiming, "I much doubt, my dear sir, whether you will be able to proceed to-day. Allow me to show you the way to my house, madam," he continued, offering his hand to the elder of two ladies who were present. "I hope, my fair young friend, the lightning does not alarm you."

"Not in the least, sir," replied the young lady, in a low tone, as they advanced towards the house. "It is awful as well as beautiful; but, surely, not frightful."

The elder lady, however, trembled so violently that it was evident she possessed no particle of her daughter's courage; and, leading her forward, Sir Andrew Stalbrooke exerted himself to the utmost to make her forget her apprehensions, by talking of the accident that had happened, and inquiring into all the particulars. Servants with mantles and all kinds of protections against the weather met them half way; but Sir Andrew—thinking it unnecessary to cover up people who, he now saw, were already wet to the skin, from any farther effects of the storm—hurried on as fast as possible, till he had safely lodged the whole party, inclusive of two waiting women, within the glass door of the great hall. Housekeepers and housemaids were there in attendance, every member of Sir Andrew's household knowing how to calculate to the utmost nicety what would be his conduct on such occasions.

"Mistress Wallis," he said to the housekeeper, "pray conduct these two ladies immediately to their chambers. Send down instantly for whatsoever mails they may want from the carriage to change their wet clothing; and pray see that it be done effectually. Madam," he continued, to the elder lady, "let me beg you to make my house for the time your home. It will be impossible for you to proceed for many hours; and therefore, though an old gentleman's solitude may not afford you the most agreeable resting-place in the world, you must e'en content yourselves with it for a time. I will take care of this gentleman, if he will follow me, and act as his groom of the chamber, as I have unfortunately sent my own servant out."

The party who had met with the accident were willing to offer every sort of apology and excuse for the trouble they were giving. But Sir Andrew laid his finger

quietly on the sleeve of the gentleman's coat, from which the water was absolutely trickling down upon the marble pavement of the hall, and said, "My dear sir, if any apology were really necessary, this drenched garment would be the strongest of all reasons for cutting it short. If you will do me the favour to follow me, we shall all be in a condition to converse with each other more fully in a short time."

CHAPTER III.

If we were in general to judge by the manners of one of our countrymen towards a stranger, whom he meets for the first time, of what was really passing in his heart, and to suppose that he obeyed the divine precept, to love his neighbour as himself, there would certainly be no being under the sun which fulfilled likewise the precept addressed to a sinner, of hating himself, so thoroughly as an Englishman. There seems, in short, a sort of natural antipathy between an Englishman and a stranger, which cannot be got over till the relationship in which it takes its rise is extinguished; but although Sir Andrew Stalbrooke was an Englishman *par excellence*, and had all the finer, and the better, and the nobler qualities of his countrymen, he had in his early life mingled much with foreign nations, seen much of foreign countries, and rubbed off, in short, that husk of reserve which in our own land so often keeps man from man. In about half an hour from the period at which we last left him, he was in the drawing-room of his own house, having, in the interim, completely changed his wet suit, and, notwithstanding the absence of his valet, appearing as neat, as clean, and as well powdered as ever. Here, then, he waited for about twenty minutes longer, with his heart overflowing with all sorts of kind and hospitable thoughts towards his guests, hoping that Mistress Wallis would take every care of the two ladies, and that neither alarm nor wetting would do them any harm.

At the end of about a quarter of an hour more, the drawing-room door opened, and the gentleman who headed the party in the carriage appeared with changed garments, and an aspect somewhat less disconsolate than he had borne when Sir Andrew had last seen him. He was a man of the middle age, or, perhaps, somewhat beyond it; tall, thin, and gentlemanlike in appearance, but somewhat stiff and rigid in his carriage. His countenance was pale, even sallow; and though the features were good, there was a narrow keenness about the eyes which gave him a look of vulture-like sharpness; while

the close fixing of the determined teeth, and a wrinkled frown, which had become habitual, on the brow, spoke to the dabbler in physiognomy a harsh and tyrannical disposition, if not an unfeeling and remorseless heart. His dress was very plain, but it was of fine and costly materials; and every part of it, without being quite new, had still the gloss of newness upon it.

"I have, Sir Andrew, to thank you," he said, advancing towards his host with a formal bow, "to thank you most sincerely for your hospitality towards me, and my wife and daughter. They will be down in a few minutes, and offer you their thanks themselves."

"My dear sir," replied Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, "believe me that thanks are quite unnecessary; nay, more, even painful to me; inasmuch as, having received pleasure already from the opportunity of showing you any little attention, I should be receiving more than my right if I permitted you to add thanks to the pleasure you have given by accepting it."

The other replied, urging in formal terms the expression of his gratitude; and then added, "I doubt not, Sir Andrew, that the servant who came up to your house made you acquainted with my name, and my near connexion with your neighbour, and, I believe, friend, Lady Mallory."

"No, indeed," replied Sir Andrew. "I keep up the old custom here, my dear sir, and, of course, ask no one's name; but I can assure you it adds to the pleasure I have received from your taking shelter here, to learn that you are connected with that fair and very excellent lady."

"My name, sir," replied the gentleman, "is Forrest; and, I am happy to say, I am her first cousin. It is true," he added, perhaps seeing a slight shade of surprise upon the countenance of his entertainer, "it is true, some old family disputes have kept Lady Mallory and myself as strangers to each other for many years. I am happy to say, however, that such unpleasant circumstances have terminated; and I am on my way, even now, with my wife and daughter, and my nephew, who follows us on horseback, to pay a long-promised visit to my fair cousin. We take her by surprise, indeed; but she informed me that she had always room for us."

"Were the cause less unpleasant than it is," replied

Sir Andrew, "I should be inclined to say I *hope* that your thus taking Lady Mallory by surprise might afford me the pleasure of your company for a day or two longer, Mr. Forrest; but I am grieved to be obliged to tell you that Lady Mallory is far from well. Two days ago it was even reported that she was in danger; but yesterday we had more favourable accounts, and my nephew is now over at her house making inquiries after her health."

The countenance of Mr. Forrest fell; but what he was about to reply was cut short by the entrance of his wife and daughter, whom he formally introduced to Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, perhaps not unwilling to pause a little ere he replied to the implied invitation of his host, and to consider how he had best act under the circumstances in which Lady Mallory's illness had placed him.

In due propriety, we must speak of the elder lady, who now appeared, first. It has been remarked that, in general, persons choose to unite themselves in matrimony to a partner the most opposite in every point, moral and physical. Generally speaking, indeed, it seems as if everybody, upon intimate acquaintance, became heartily sick of his own self, and married a person as unlike the disagreeable original as possible. There are, however, exceptions. Sometimes we do find two handsome people, two clever people, two graceful people, two tall people, or two short people, united together in the bond of wedlock; and in one respect, at least, this was the case with Mr. and Mrs. Forrest. They were both of them tall; but here the similarity ended, for her whole demeanour confirmed the tale told by her countenance, of gentle pliability of character, of patient endurance of sorrows, perhaps of wrong; endurance which left melancholy, but not bitterness behind. Her eyes were large, full, and tender, and still very beautiful, though many a tear had dimmed the brightness of their deep hazel hue. The rest of her features were all fine; and, even now that she had passed, by twenty years, the prime of life, had been worn with anxieties and depressed with sorrows; even now, no one could look upon her without exclaiming, "How beautiful she must have been!" She had much quiet dignity and grace of demeanour; but there seemed some power in her husband's eye when it fell upon her, capable of taking all strength away from her limbs, making her steps unsteady, and her whole frame shrink with apprehension.

The younger lady, Edith Forrest, was by no means affected in the same way, however stern might be the look of her father. She was small in person, but beautifully formed, with every rounded limb full of grace and symmetry; the small, beautiful foot, the delicately-formed hand, the arm, the movements of which never formed one ungraceful angle, were all in exact proportion to her height; so that, to see her standing apart, uncontrasted with other persons, the smallness of her size was scarcely perceptible.

Her face could scarcely be called regularly handsome, and yet, once seen, it was not easily forgotten; it was so full of varying expression, from the light and sparkling look of gay enjoyment, to the downcast gaze of deep and shadowy thought, or the upturned glance of intense feeling, when the heart seemed to raise the eyes towards those heavens, not less blue than they were, not less pure and intense, and deep, and bright than itself. She moved across the room to be introduced to Sir Andrew Stalbrooke with that exquisite and easy grace which nothing can describe, but which never fails in exciting admiration, even in the rude and uncultivated.

Such, however, was by no means the character of the Gentleman of the Old School. Everything that was beautiful in art or nature found some responsive feeling in his heart; and, as Edith advanced towards him, his eye rested upon her for a moment with more earnestness than his courtesy would have permitted, had he not been so much struck with her appearance as for a moment quite to forget himself. At that instant she had raised her eyes towards him, with the memory of his courteous kindness during the storm fresh in her heart, and the sparkling pleasure of such feelings beaming up in her look. The grace of her movements might call forth simple admiration; but there was a living poetry in that grace, combined with that expression, which woke up in the heart of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke the recollection of early dreams, and hopes gone by, and joys passed away for ever. He gazed at her, therefore, earnestly, more earnestly than was his custom; but, recollecting himself, the moment after he advanced, with a well-pleased smile, to meet her as her father presented her to him, and, gently taking her hand, hoped that she had recovered from her apprehensions regarding the storm.

"Oh, it was not I who was frightened," she said; "it was my mother. I am not at all alarmed at thunder; but it makes her ill, even before it comes on."

"Fear of course makes her ill," said Mr. Forrest, with a curling lip; "but doubtless, if she had not accustomed herself to give way to such terrors, she would escape the illness also."

Mrs. Forrest bent down her eyes and made no comment, and Sir Andrew Stalbrooke delicately and immediately led the conversation away from a subject which had already become painful, by an easy transition from the storm to the effect produced by clouds and sunshine upon the fair scene before the windows, through which Edith's eyes were gazing with a look of melancholy thought, as if the jarring words spoken by her father to her mother still excited some wonder as well as sorrow.

"One unpleasant effect of the storm, Miss Forrest," said Sir Andrew, turning to the young lady, "has been to make the first sight of this place somewhat dark and gloomy. It is not so in general, however; for I can assure you that the prospect before your eyes varies with every changing aspect of the sky above it; and I have seen the countenance of nature, as there set forth, bear at least twenty expressions in the day."

"Like the countenance of some creature of caprice," said Mr. Forrest, in a civil tone, but with a sneer upon his lip which he found it difficult at any time to suppress.

"Not exactly," replied the baronet; "I should be sorry to apply such a simile to a scene of which I am peculiarly fond."

"Perhaps," said Edith, in a low tone, "it may be beautiful under all its aspects, as it seems to me now, notwithstanding the clouds; and then it will be like a feeling and gentle heart, which may be melancholy, and even gloomy, under sorrows and adversities—the clouds and storms of life—but still smile up brightly again to joys and amusements—the light and sunshine of being—or change under the gleams of fancy, or sparkle brightly under the passed-by shower of temporary disappointment, when the sun begins to look forth again, as I see that he is doing now upon the opposite hills."

Sir Andrew smiled affectionately upon her as she spoke, and then said, "You speak like a painter, fair lady—"

"Like a poet, rather, Sir Andrew," said her father, interrupting him. "Edith has a habit of letting her imagination run away with her judgment."

"Whether poet or painter," replied Sir Andrew, passing over the bitterer part of his guest's speech without comment, "she is equally well fitted for what I was going to propose; namely, to look at a small collection of pictures that I have in some rooms beyond my library. They are few, but very beautiful; and every fine picture addresses itself first to the imagination, as porteress of the heart. Mrs. Forrest," he continued, "will you permit me to lead you thither? I value them not only because I admire them myself, but because I was aided and directed in collecting them by a friend who is now no more, and who, if I may use the term, expended as much life, that is to say, of what is valuable and estimable in life, in the course of a few short years, as most others do in a long existence, whether they see themselves wither in inactivity, or whiten under the slow exertion of qualities but half employed."

Mrs. Forrest willingly signified her assent, and Sir Andrew led the way through his library into two rooms beyond, which faced the north. The light was clear and cool, and whatever were the beauties or defects of each picture, it was seen to the utmost possible advantage. Sir Andrew himself had a fine taste in the arts; and as the whole collection, with a very few exceptions, had been made by himself, he had taken care that it should contain nothing but what was absolutely good. There were one or two pictures by Guido, a few by Salvator Rosa, two Titians in his purer and richer manner, a single masterly Paul Veronese, a Domenichino, specimens of the Carraccis, and a beautiful picture of Endymion sleeping, by Guercino. Although, at the time I speak of, Murillo was scarcely known in this country, four of his finest pictures were to be found in that small collection; and besides, there were some thirty or forty exquisite landscapes by the best painters, and in the most different styles: Claudes, Poussins, Cuyps, Hobbimas, and Wouvermans; while in one room was a small painting by Raphael, covered by a curtain to keep off the dust, and in the other an exquisite head of a Madonna by an unknown Spanish artist, which, although the name of the painter might never have reached celebrity, Sir Andrew did not value less

than any other picture in his collection, so beautiful was the expression, so masterly the execution of that single head.

Mrs. Forrest seemed to enjoy the sight of these pictures much, but Edith enjoyed them more still; and to her young and enthusiastic mind, every painting, of whatever character, seemed to afford some fresh source of enjoyment. Although she did not appear to be without some knowledge of the subject, yet she spoke not, she judged not as a connoisseur. It was not alone the beauty of the handling, the fineness of the colouring, the breadth, the juice, the contour; these were to her mind what in fact they really are, merely the mechanical parts of the art employed for the purpose of producing, when complete and perfect, an effect upon the human soul. Painting, as well as sculpture, is, after all, but a hieroglyphic character, in which one great mind writes down its magnificent conceptions for the benefit of others like itself. The mechanical skill with which it does so affects the marble or the canvass, shapes the rude block into graceful forms, or covers the blank sheet with glowing colours; but it is the thought in the mind of the artist which speaks to the mind of others. Where there is no thought, you have but a meaningless scroll, like a child's copybook, where the letters may be perfectly formed, but the sense wanting.

Thus, when Edith Forrest gazed on that picture of Guercino, where Endymion lies sleeping, with the yellow rays of the distant moon pouring down upon his closed eyelids, the poetical appeal to her imagination was as complete as if Homer, or Milton, or Shakspeare had addressed it to her in words. She saw him dream beneath her eyes, and she dreamed too of what his dreams might be,

> "Of golden palaces, strange minstrelsy,
> Fountains grotesque, new trees, bespangled caves,
> Echoing grottoes, full of trembling waves
> And moonlight, ay, of all the mazy world
> Of silvery enchantment—"

Or when she looked into one of the calm, deep pictures of Poussin, with shady woods, and solitary glens, and fragments of the ancient splendour of past times now green with ruin and decay, a thousand recollections rose up of scenes like that through which her own foot-

steps had strayed in other lands. Memory then took imagination by the hand, and led her on to a bright future, where the enjoyment of those objects which nature has spread around the human heart to excite its higher feelings, and of those feelings by which the human heart, in its aspiration for all brightness, asserts its kindred to heaven, should be without the dark alloy, the bitter drop, that had too often mingled with every pleasure in the past, and turned the sweet cup into gall. Or when, again, she looked upon the sweet countenance of that Madonna, she read there the deep, calm grief mingling with hope, at once the triumph and the sorrow, the humility and the elevation, the resignation and the confidence, the agony of the mortal mother, the grand faith in the immortal Son. She read it all in those skilful lines; the picture of Mary's heart when all was complete, and the last awful act of the atonement made, when man's guilt consummated God's mercy, and "the sword had pierced through her own soul also."

As she gazed and went on from one to another, she spoke but little, and that only when the words of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke or of her mother called for a reply. But when she did speak, the spirit of poetry that breathed forth, the rich, deep, unusual tone of feeling and of thought in one so young, the revelling of her imagination through the wide field of association, the deep purity of every idea, the elevating tendency of every fancy, struck, surprised, and pleased the high-minded old man beside her, and filled him with feelings such as he had seldom experienced before.

"Her fancy's flight is like the lark, all upward," he murmured to himself. But yet, strange to say, even the sweet pleasure of approving was not altogether without some mixture of pain in the bosom of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke. "How I could have loved a child like this," he thought; but the next moment he reproached himself for such a feeling. Was it not enough that he had his dear sister's son? he asked himself, noble and generous, brave and upright, full of high feelings and fine sympathies; was it not enough that he had him? and Sir Andrew Stalbrooke coloured slightly under the reproaches of his own heart, as if his nephew could have seen that he had done him wrong, even by a thought.

The comments of Mr. Forrest upon the collection of pictures were not so pleasant as those of his daughter. He understood the subject, it is true, better than she did, as a mere matter of art. He was competent to decide upon the accuracy of every line and of every shade; but he did so with somewhat of a sneering and supercilious air, which somewhat puzzled Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, as he admitted, at the same time, that it was one of the finest small collections that he had ever seen. Sir Andrew, however, was not a man to seek explanation by any means that would imply a reproof, in a matter which was a mere affair of taste; and he only remarked,

"You seem to be very fond of fine pictures, Mr. Forrest, and to have studied them much."

"I am fond of Indian screens too," replied Mr. Forrest, "and don't dislike old china or well-painted tea-trays. As to pictures, I think them among the most useless and expensive pieces of extravagance in which this good world is disposed to indulge."

Sir Andrew felt that the speech was rude; but he was in his own house, and he replied as gently as possible, "I do not quite agree with you, Mr. Forrest, in regard to really fine pictures. If man were an animal, composed solely of his material form, and a principle, whether material or not, which was given him for the purpose of providing himself with food, and guarding against dangers or injuries, I would be very willing to confine all his efforts to those arts which might best contribute to his material comfort, according to the school which is rising up in the present day, and to the acquisition of such knowledge as might tend to the same object. But I look upon man as a very different creature, my dear sir. I believe him to be possessed of an immortal part also; and I look upon his imagination as one of the finest qualities of that immortal part. It seems to me that his imagination, in short, is nearer akin to a higher state of being than even his reason itself, and that it speaks more plainly and distinctly the fact of his immortality. His reason has a full and proper sphere of action in this very world in which we live: if there were to be no other state of being, his reason would have fulfilled its destiny here, without pointing to, or dreaming of, a hereafter. Not so his imagination, which is full of aspirations after higher

things, which is continually rejecting the forms that surround it, to create out of the only materials within its reach more splendid scenes, more magnificent habitations, and to point to them as the boons of futurity. I have always thought, and felt, and believed, that, though much gratitude may be due to those who tend to cultivate our reason, to improve our arts, and to provide for our material comfort; those who address themselves with noble purposes to our imagination—the painter, the poet, the sculptor, or the musician; who seek to purify, to elevate, to direct that great quality of the immortal soul; to give, in fact, to fancy the wings of the seraph, not only deserve higher thanks, but are in their very selves of a higher nature, dealing with a higher power, treating with greater intelligences, and are, in short, among the princes of the human mind."

"I have no great fancy for princes of any kind," muttered Mr. Forrest; but Sir Andrew Stalbrooke would not reply. He had spoken more at length, indeed, than he had intended to do, and had got warm in speaking, and he feared for his own courtesy if the conversation went farther. It took a new turn, however, a moment or two after; for steps were heard in the adjoining library, and voices speaking; and the next moment, through the door which had been left open, two young gentlemen, whom we have before introduced to the reader, entered the room. Although we have already described them, we must yet pause for a moment to notice the contrast of their appearance to the eyes of those in the picture-gallery, as they advanced side by side.

They were both decidedly handsome, as far as features went; but the one was bad in expression, somewhat stiff and assuming in demeanour, and his dress spoke fashion rather than taste. Ralph Strafford, on the other hand, bore on his countenance the light of a high heart, and a powerful and intelligent mind. All his movements were easy, graceful, and unstudied. He felt not, or at least seemed not to feel, that there was any eye upon him; and health, and vigour, and grace-giving exercises, and the sympathy which generally exists between the mind and the body, afforded to every movement that air of ease and power which is one of the most distinguishing marks of the heart's gentleman

As the two entered, Sir Andrew Stalbrooke felt proud of his nephew, and gazed at him a moment as he advanced, till, turning to his guests to introduce young Strafford to them, he saw that a slight additional shade of red had come up in Edith's cheek.

As soon as Strafford introduced the young stranger to his uncle, and Sir Andrew found that this was the nephew whom Mr. Forrest had been expecting, the baronet's mind rapidly ran on to other conclusions, and for a moment he fancied that the cause of Edith's blush might be the appearance of her cousin. He was surprised, however, to see his own nephew advance with a well-pleased air towards Edith and Mrs. Forrest, and welcome them to England by the name of Quintin. He was evidently known, too, to Mr. Forrest; but nothing passed between them but a formal bow. Mr. Forrest, however, hastened to explain to Sir Andrew Stalbrooke the acquaintance between his family and that gentleman's nephew, saying, "My wife and daughter are under some obligations to this gentleman, who, I find, is your nephew. In passing through Germany about a year since, which we thought it best to do under a feigned name, we got entangled with the armies; and while I was obliged to go to Frankfort for the necessary papers to facilitate us on our way, these ladies might have been put to considerable inconvenience had it not been for the kindness and attention of this gentleman, who deprived me of the opportunity of thanking him fully by leaving Lipstadt on the day after my return."

Some complimentary nothings then passed between Mr. Forrest and Ralph Strafford; and the state of Lady Mallory's health having been mentioned, it was finally arranged that Mr. Forrest and his family should take up their abode at Stalbrooke Castle for at least that day, and that on the following morning a note should be sent over to Lady Mallory to inquire after her health, and ask when she could conveniently receive her relations.

CHAPTER IV.

It is impossible to say that the evening at Stalbrooke Castle passed over pleasantly. The clouds, it is true, were swept away from the sky, the sun shone out brightly, the evening was as calm and as beautiful as the joys of innocence, and the day went down in splendour and in smiles. But although we have used the varying aspect of our atmosphere as a figure to display some of the changes in the mind of man, yet there are minds, as there are climates, ever full of clouds and storms, replete with mist and darkness. Such was the mind of Mr. Forrest. Towards Sir Andrew Stalbrooke himself he evidently laboured to maintain a polite and courteous demeanour; but yet it was evidently all effort; and from time to time, in spite of his best skill, some bitter reply would be murmured half audibly; some sarcastic and biting observation upon human nature, human life, the power and goodness of God, or the beauties of creation, would form a strange, harsh contrast with the bright clear views of the Gentleman of the Old School, whose judgment of all things was sunshiny and pure; at times, perhaps, touched a little with melancholy, but never with bitterness; and the clouds of whose mind were never so dense as to prevent the sun from shining through them, and brightening the shower with the rainbow.

It might be, indeed, that the perfect contrast between the minds of the two, between their whole feelings, thoughts, and principles, in some degree irritated Mr. Forrest, and made an unruly temper more difficult than ever to govern. But it was upon his wife and daughter that most frequently his ill temper displayed itself, and that in a way which, though evidently habitual, was extremely painful to witness. It seemed as if, in her husband's opinion, there was not one thought or taste of Mrs. Forrest that was not ridiculous; and though he expressed his feelings on these subjects in words that could scarcely be called rude, yet there was a bitterness in the turn of the expression, as well as in the thought, which was the more painful and aggravating, because

the mere words were not ungentlemanly. In regard to his daughter he pursued a different plan; for some reason he did not think fit to deride or sneer at her opinions; but he spoke to her even upon the slightest matters in a tone of command which marked the domestic tyrant, and at the same time Sir Andrew Stalbrooke thought he could perceive a sort of bitter and meaning look which implied something even more.

Such was the conduct of the father; that of the nephew was, to one of the party at least, even still more disagreeable. There is in all ages and at all times a class of young men of whom John Forrest was but a type; and perhaps there is not a class so deservedly to be detested upon the face of the earth. He had considerable talents of various kinds, and the possession of those talents made him idly fancy that he possessed genius, that most rare of all jewels. The belief that he possessed genius, based upon natural self-conceit, and stimulated into activity by egregious vanity, induced him to have recourse to every means for the purpose of forcing the same opinion of his merits down the throats of other people. As self-conceit, from the impossibility of its being always gratified, is generally a pugnacious quality, he, like many others, soon learned to believe that the strongest proof of genius was to assail the opinions which the good and the wise have received and promulgated; and, with a natural turn for speculation, which he called philosophy; considerable powers of sophistry, which he called logic; a supercilious smile, and a sarcastic expression of countenance, he had convinced a great many soft persons that he was what he pretended to be, a man of real and sterling genius, who was to be courted, feared, and admired. Though he was thus far successful, and had gathered around him in the capital a circle of small idolaters, who adopted his philosophy, spread his fame, and talked him into notoriety, John Forrest was nevertheless a disappointed man. The credit he obtained, though far more than he deserved, did not satisfy the greediness of his self-conceit. In the first place, he found that, though flattered and caressed, he was by no means generally loved or liked; and he was shrewd enough to perceive, that even among women his success and favour was principally, if not altogether, with those who had neither minds, nor principles, nor hearts; that

they gratified his vanity to gratify their own; and that there were very many who, though they might not be able to combat his arguments even if they had tried, viewed him with coldness, reprobation, and contempt. All this spread a bitterness through his mind; and that weakest of small ambitions, the love of saying a smart thing, was mingled with a sneering virulence from the disappointment of egregious vanity.

In the course of the evening at Stalbrooke Castle these qualities displayed themselves more than once. Sir Andrew Stalbrooke heard him calmly and patiently; never for a moment forgot the courtesy of his demeanour, but always expressed his dissent from doctrines that he thought evil in their nature or dangerous in their tendency; and, much to the annoyance of the young lawyer, without entering into long disputes upon any subject, sometimes overthrew his favourite theories by five or six words of simple reason thrown in at the proper moment, sometimes in a single sentence carried on his would-be axioms into absurdity, and marked the consequence with a smile.

John Forrest writhed under this treatment. He was always sure, if any one in society entered into argument with him, either so to involve his ideas in a cloud of subtle words as to defy any adversary to clear them up and overthrow them, or so to lead his opponent on by constantly shifting his ground as to make him drop the discussion, not only from becoming tired of it himself, but from perceiving that it wearied others. But that which tortured him in the present case was what he internally termed the assumed superiority of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke's tone; in reality, the native superiority of his character and mind. His supercilious contempt for the opinions of others, however, was not displayed towards Sir Andrew alone. His uncle was equally the object of it; and scarcely could his cousin Edith utter a sentence which was not met by some observation equally unjust and uncourteous.

There was another person in the house, however, who marked all this; and, feeling that he had not the same command over himself as Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, more than once quitted the room, for fear that he should either be led into an angry argument, or behave uncourteously to a guest in his uncle's house. When in the room Ralph Strafford remained nearly silent, ex-

cept when sitting by Mrs. Forrest or Edith. The former he endeavoured, as far as possible, to amuse and entertain, and to turn her thoughts from all that was unpleasant.

"She must be subject to this every day, it is true," thought Strafford; "but still, when a garden has but few flowers, the few that there are seem the more dear and beautiful; and I may as well do what I can to make the hours that she is here pass pleasantly, poor thing."

He was not so frequently at Edith's side; for he remarked a degree of uneasiness come over Mr. Forrest's face as soon as he saw him there, and he had a key to the cause of that uneasiness, which we shall explain hereafter. We must not deny, however, that, when he did speak to Edith, though there was no display of any other feeling than that of gentlemanly courtesy towards a lady that he knew and liked, yet to a very keen and criticising eye there might have appeared in his manner a certain degree of admiration, and a still greater degree of tenderness—perhaps springing from pity, for on many accounts Ralph Strafford did pity Edith Forrest.

When he was sitting by and talking to any one else, however, the looks of the young officer were frequently turned upon the fair girl before him with a sort of earnest contemplation that seemed altogether to absorb him; and then, when any one appeared to remark him, he withdrew his eyes suddenly, and cast them on the ground with a thoughtful look, as if something surprised and puzzled him. He seemed to watch her particularly whenever her cousin approached her or spoke to her; and as he evidently saw that she shrunk from him with dread at least, if not dislike, and always answered him briefly and coldly, though gently, his surprise seemed to increase.

Once or twice in the course of the afternoon and evening Edith's looks were raised towards his with an inquiring glance, as if there were something also in his conduct which she did not fully comprehend. But they had no opportunity of speaking for any length of time alone; and it was only, indeed, for a single moment, when, at the request of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, his nephew was leading Miss Forrest to a very fine organ in the music-room, that he had an opportunity of saying in a low

tone, "It is long since we have met, Miss Forrest, and months make great changes."

The colour rushed warmly into Edith's cheek, and she kept her eyes bent upon the ground, while her breath seemed to come short. "There is no change in me, Mr. Strafford," she said, in the same tone: "I am sorry to see that you are much graver, and do not appear so well."

"There has been a cause, Miss Forrest," replied Strafford; "a cause which I must find an opportunity of explaining to you."

She turned a little pale; and he added, "I have nothing to say that can pain you."

Almost as he spoke, her father was by their side, and the conversation turned upon the music which was about to be performed.

Nothing else occurred during the evening worthy of note, and the whole party retired early. The next morning broke clear and bright; and though somewhat cooler for the storm of the past day, the atmosphere was yet summery and genial. It was scarcely five o'clock in the morning when Strafford left his bed, and, to say sooth, that bed had been very little visited by slumber during the night. His thoughts were disturbed, and, like many another, he lay striving to discover, by the unaided power of imagination, his way through a labyrinth of which he had no clew.

Wearied at length, he rose, and, throwing open the window, gazed over the park. From the room in which he stood he could see across the esplanade before the house, over the wide expanse of turf, studded here and there with majestic trees, which formed the deerpark of Stalbrooke. On an eminence to the right was a considerable wood of fine chestnuts. A large piece of water lay glistening at some distance beyond. To the left lay the part of the park stretching away towards the village, and a small stream was seen gleaming in and out among the trees and banks in the bottom of the valley. The deer were feeding in herds in the morning sunshine, and a forester with his gun was taking his way upon his early rounds. The scene was calm, and rich, and beautiful, with nothing naked or exposed about it, and yet full of expansion and freedom; the eye seemed to rejoice in the power to rove, the heart beat more free, the breath came more lightly.

Ralph Strafford stood at the window and gazed, and his thoughts became more calm from that fine sight. As he did so, however, steps passed his room door, and in a minute or two after he saw young Forrest issue forth from the house with a fishing-rod in his hand, and take his way across the esplanade. He certainly was not the person of all others that Strafford would have been most inclined to encounter, generally speaking; but his old schoolfellow looked up, and, seeing him at the window, exclaimed, "I am going down to the stream to see if fishes be as foolish things as men, and still fail to see the hook, be the bait ever so trifling. Will you come with me?"

"I am not dressed yet," replied Strafford; "but I will come down and join you by-and by."

The other waved his hand with a somewhat studied grace, and walked on, and Strafford proceeded slowly to dress himself in order to follow. There were questions which he wished to ask, knowledge which he wished to gain, and in regard to which, perhaps, nobody could furnish him with better information than young Forrest himself. But yet there was in the breast of Ralph Strafford a feeling of repugnance towards any communication whatsoever, farther than a mere ordinary interchange of civilities, with his former schoolfellow, which made him pause, doubtful as to what he should do. Accordingly, when he was dressed, on which operation he bestowed more time than usual, he descended into the library, and then once more paused, looking out of the window. As he did so, he heard something move in the picture gallery, the door of which he perceived was ajar. It was now about half past six o'clock; the servants were all up and stirring; but still there was something which induced Strafford to open the door of the gallery and go in. There might be a hope in his bosom, which certainly did not amount to an expectation, of seeing the person that he did see. But that hope was so faint, that the surprise upon his countenance, as he advanced towards Edith Forrest, was quite natural.

"Good heavens! Miss Forrest," he said, "you are up very early."

"I am always up very early," she replied; "you know that of old in Germany."

"I thought those might be German habits," answered

her companion, "and that they might have worn away in England."

"Oh no," she replied, "I am not changed in those respects."

"And in none others?" demanded Strafford, with a look of some meaning.

"In none," she answered, with a faint blush and a still fainter sigh; "in none that I know of;" and then, as if anxious to change the subject, she added, "I always like to rise early in the morning, because I may call that my only time for uninterrupted thought, when I can ponder and pause as I will, and dream dreams, as my father calls it, that come to nothing."

"That is, I suppose, a warning for me to go," replied Strafford, "and not to deprive you of your solitary pleasure."

As he spoke he dropped the hand that he had taken and retained for a moment in his own, and took a step or two back, as if to quit the gallery, adding, "Shall I leave you?"

Edith was evidently embarrassed: what she had said referred alone to the rest of her family; to the dissensions, sneers, and bitterness, that often made solitude a relief to her; but yet she could harly explain this to Strafford, and for a moment she paused, pained and hesitating. "No," she said at length, looking up frankly, with the full light of her eyes beaming upon him; "no, do not go: you misunderstood me, or, rather, I did not say what I meant."

The necessity of determining something very often decides the nature of our determination. Ralph Strafford knew and felt that he might never again, or at least not for long, have any opportunity of entering into a full explanation with Edith Forrest; and though he believed that he might risk much, even her good opinion, by the step he was about to take, yet the necessity of deciding what he was to do made him determine upon doing what was even more than necessary. It is true, that bright, speaking look, that sparkling forth of a pure, frank heart, might have something to do with the decision. But he returned at once towards her, holding out his hand, took hers in his, and, raising it to his lips, replied, "Edith, I have much to say to you, much that I have long wished to say: fate most unexpectedly seems to have placed an hour or two at our

own disposal. Let us not waste it; for to any person who feels rightly, friendship and fair esteem, if it be no more, is worth preserving. If I really do not intrude upon your time, will you take a walk with me through the park this beautiful morning?"

Edith had turned pale, her eyes were cast down, and she was evidently a good deal agitated.

"Your cousin has gone down to fish in the river," added Strafford: "I have promised to join him there before breakfast. Shall we take our walk thither? All I have to say may be said before we reach the stream."

"Oh no, no!" cried Edith, eagerly, "not to join him of all people on earth. But there is no reason, I suppose, why I should not walk out with you in the park, if you wish it."

"None, none!" replied Strafford; "there can be none;" and in a few minutes they were upon their way.

How often in life do we long for opportunities which, when they come, we scarcely know how to employ. It is, indeed, with them but as with every other good thing of life; they are coveted at a distance, and yet nine times out of ten, from our own faults, confer not all that we expected from them. Ralph Strafford had sought that solitary walk, and yet, as it went on, he felt a difficulty in taking advantage of it, even for the explanation which he so much desired. But the thought that he might be interrupted soon nerved him to his task; and the sort of timid anxiety in Edith's look and manner, as if she were under some apprehension of blame, even while she was doing nothing blameworthy, gave him courage, ay, and even gave him hope.

"Edith," he said at length, as they took their way towards the wood of chestnut-trees on the right, "Edith," he said, for the feelings in his heart would not suffer him to call her by a colder name, "much that I see requires explanation, and I have some also to give myself; for it is clear to me that those who, I think, were bound to do it, have not explained to you what should have been explained."

Edith was silent, and, after a pause, he went on: "I need not remind you, Edith," he said, "of the great intimacy which the circumstances into which we were thrown produced in Germany. I had an opportunity of being of some assistance to you and your sweet mother, and you repaid, far more than repaid, anything that I

could do for you by the friendship and confidence you placed in me. You suffered me to be your counsellor and your adviser in all things; and I tried, to the best of my power, to act the part of a brother to you till your father's return."

"Why did you leave us, then?" demanded Edith, eagerly looking up in his face; "why did you quit us so abruptly, and never see us more; not even when I saw you pass by the inn at Mayence, and I could hardly doubt that you saw me—"

"I did see you," replied Strafford; "I knew you were there; nay, more, I accompanied you thither step by step along the road, because, till I saw you safe on that side of the Rhine, I could not feel satisfied that you were in security."

"Then why, oh why," said Edith, in a low, sad, and somewhat reproachful tone, "why did you deprive us of the pleasure of seeing you? Did you think that Edith Forrest and her poor mother were people to whom gratitude was likely to be a burden, or that she was one of those idle and contemptible people who could know worth, and profess warm friendship, and the next day be cold and strange? Oh! Captain Strafford, Captain Strafford, if you judged of her thus, you did very well to drop her acquaintance; but not," she added, a moment after, looking up in his face with one of her beaming smiles, "but not to follow her to Mayence, for that might make her think that you did not judge of her quite so harshly."

"Harshly, Edith! harshly, dear Edith!" replied Strafford. "Oh no! Edith, you must have known, and you must have felt, what were the words that hung upon my lips at the moment that the arrival of your father from Frankfort interrupted us. Edith, I see that you are not, you cannot be, aware, that on that very night, in a long conversation with your father, he informed me your hand was engaged to your cousin and your heart was his."

Edith suddenly withdrew her arm from Strafford's, and, clasping her hands together, gazed in his face as pale as death. For a moment or two it seemed that she was deprived of power to speak; but at length she exclaimed, "His! his! his whom I hate and abhor! Oh, Strafford! did you believe it?"

"I did not know him, Edith," replied Strafford. "I

had known him but as a boy at school; but I knew not then that he was any connexion or relation of yours. No name was mentioned. He was merely called your cousin. Since I have seen you together, I know and judge better. I felt sure, all last night, that one part of the statement at least could not be just."

"Oh! you should not have believed it even before," cried Edith, eagerly. "Could you believe, could you suppose, for one moment, that I would act towards you as I did then, if my hand or my heart either had been engaged to my cousin?"

"I had your own father's word for it, Edith," replied Strafford; "he waited not to hear anything that I could say upon the subject; but, after thanking me with cold and formal but more than sufficient thanks, he added, that he feared he must caution me that you were engaged, in the manner I have said, to your cousin; adding, that the constant visits and attentions of a gentleman in my situation might cause reports to be circulated which would be both erroneous and unpleasant."

"Oh! what must I do?" said Edith, sadly; "what must I do, when it is my own father that has committed such an act? I dare not cast one word of blame upon him; but I may at least tell you the whole truth, as it concerns myself. First, I do not believe that my cousin has even the slightest particle of regard for me, or that he ever even wished for the hand which you were told was promised to him. He never should have it, even if I were a beggar in the streets. It is true, Captain Strafford, and I must acknowledge it, that my father, who is very fond of him—far fonder than he is of me—informed me one day that his intentions were such with regard to a union between my cousin and myself."

She paused in deep emotion, and cast her eyes upon the ground for a moment or two, as if contending duties—and it was so—struggled together in her breast, irreconcilable in themselves, each powerful, each active, each eager in the strife. She paused and thought: on the one hand were the bonds of filial duty; of all that nature and God required of the daughter to the father; of all that the customs of the world added to the dictates of feeling and religion: on the other were all the considerations of what was due to her own self; to the happiness and clear current of the life in this world whose course and direction so intimately affects

the mightier life hereafter; to him who, she knew, loved her nobly, truly, deeply; to the first grand duty of truth and sincerity, when dealing with a true and a sincere heart. She would not willingly have said one word against her father; she would not even have implied an accusation against him: but his own conduct spoke for itself. She knew, she felt sure, that Strafford could not see his demeanour to herself and her mother without feeling, in regard to Mr. Forrest, far more than any words of hers could ever prompt; and, after pausing and considering, she determined to act and speak as if he already divined all the painful circumstances in which she was placed.

"I have learned, Captain Strafford, a hard lesson," she said at length, "to yield in all things to my father's will, except in matters of the deepest importance; and there to resist with a firmness which he knows will not be conquered. It is painful to me to say to you this; but the first and second time I tried, it was on my poor mother's account. The third time was on my own; and I then told him no power on earth should ever make me give my hand to John Forrest. In reply, he assured me with an oath, that if at the end of two years I refused to do so, he would choose his course as I chose mine. He said that he would make me a beggar, and leave me without a shilling in the world."

"Let him do it, dear Edith, let him do it!" replied Strafford.

"Certainly," replied Edith, "sooner than yield in that point. But I fear for my poor mother. She would suffer for my resistance; she has done so already."

Edith was very pale, and her eyes were full of tears. But they had reached the wood of chestnut-trees: no eyes marked those tears but Ralph Strafford; and sitting down on a bench under the spreading branches, she gave them their full course. Her lover let them flow for a moment or two; and then kneeling down beside her, he wiped them gently away, saying, "Listen to me, dear Edith. Your situation is indeed a painful one; but it is some happiness to think that nothing which has passed between you and I—that in no shape my love, my deep, unchanging love for you—has at all increased the difficulties and discomforts of your situation."

"That is indeed a comfort," replied Edith through her tears; "that is indeed a happiness."

"Thou art mine, then, Edith," said Strafford, gazing up in her face; "thou art mine, then. Thy words imply a promise and a hope."

Edith hid her dewy eyes upon his shoulder; for she felt that, though he had not absolutely asked her hand, and she had not promised it in words, they were bound to each other as deeply, as fully as any earthly contract could make them. Perhaps it is in love that we first find out there is a language of spirit more thrilling, more expressive than the language of the lips. We have things to say, we have thoughts to tell, we have feelings to express, too fine, too bright, too fiery to be conveyed by ordinary words. We have recourse to another tongue, the universal language of nature; and every action, every look, every touch speaks and tells, without a sound, the story of our hearts. The tale had been thus told before Edith and her lover had last parted. But after that, from her father's deceit, had come a cold, dark pause of apprehension to both.

They had now again met; the cause was explained, the fears removed; and they had felt and spoken as if their love had been before acknowledged in words. When Edith suddenly, however, felt fully, from the words of Strafford, that she had virtually owned her love and plighted her faith to him, an overpowering sense of all that she had done came over her. It was not that she doubted; it was not that she feared; it was not that the very next moment she would not have done the same; it was not that she was not prepared instantly to repeat, in distinct words, the avowal that she had implied; but yet she trembled with the emotion of conferring the greatest boon that woman can confer. The emotion was a joyful one too; for when the voice of her lover drew back the veil from her own heart, and let her, for the first time, see all the deep feelings, the full confidence, the trusting love that was in that heart towards him; when she beheld her fate for the future linked to his, and the long, bright years of futurity rising one behind the other, gilded by the mingled sunshine of love, and hope, and happiness, she felt breathless, as one does when, on climbing a high hill, some beautiful prospect suddenly bursts upon us, overpowering in its grandeur and its loveliness.

She remained silent, then; and although Strafford felt and knew that he was loved, there was something in

the covetous heart of affection that would not be contented till the full promise was spoken.

"Edith," he said, "dear Edith, answer me. You are mine; is it not so? You will be mine?"

Edith looked up almost reproachfully at the question. "I am yours, Strafford," she said, in a low voice, "as much as heart and spirit can make me; and sooner or later I will be yours, if you still continue to wish it. But, oh! Strafford, there is much to be thought of between this and then. There is a duty to be thought of —a duty both to my father and to my poor mother."

"With regard to your mother, dear Edith," cried Strafford, eagerly, "let me trust, oh, let me trust that you will secure to her greater happiness than she knows at present, by giving your hand to one for whom she has often professed her regard; who will be as a son to her, a protector, and a defender."

"As he has been before," said Edith, with a melancholy but affectionate smile; "as he has been before, Strafford. But you forget," she added, with playfulness and sadness intimately mingled in her tone, "you forget, Strafford, that if I do not marry him whom my father has pointed out, he has declared he will cast me off and make me a beggar; and your friends would sadly disapprove, I fear, of your marrying *a beggar*."

There was playfulness mingled, as we have said, with sadness in her tone; but let us confess that they were cast over the real feelings of her heart as a veil to hide the blushes of vanquished pride. Was Edith Forrest proud, then? No, she was not; for there were deeper, more powerful feelings in her heart, before which pride quailed; and pride, in the proud, bends not to any other power in our nature. There had been for a moment a feeling of pride, which made the thought of wedding him she loved, dowerless and unequal to him in the gifts of fortune, painful to her; but that pride had been combated and overcome by a bright and generous confidence; and as she thought of all the circumstances, it seemed pleasant to her to show how deeply she loved him, not by sacrificing to him mere worldly wealth, but by overcoming in her own bosom that propensity by which angels fell—pride, which leads to envy, and covetousness, and ambition, and to the misappreciation of those that love us, and to the misappreciation of ourselves. She knew that she was loved; she was sure

that he was generous; she was sure that he coveted not wealth, and that he would despise that voice which could be raised against Edith Forrest because she brought him not a dowry of great value; but yet, when she spoke of it, the dying effort of pride, like the parting struggle of the dolphin, might have tinted her cheek with varying hues if she had not spoken with a tone of playfulness which she did not feel, and to which the sadness that mingled with it brought a denial in the same instant.

"Fy, Edith, fy!" replied Strafford; "I have no friends of such a sort. My own fortune, thank Ged, is enough to afford you and I and your mother competence. I have no relation on whom I have the slightest dependance, except the best, the most amiable, the kindest, the most generous of men; I mean my dear uncle. But I dare boldly take upon me to promise, Edith, that, as he has been a father to me, so he will be a father to you; and that he will no more consider whether you have fortune or not, than he would think of whether a woman were beautiful or not when he was called upon to defend her."

Edith paused for a moment while her mind ran on into the future; and she said at length, "But my father, Strafford, my father. I must not violate my duty towards him. I have a right, I know I have a right, to refuse to promise love where love cannot be given; to refuse to sacrifice the whole peace of my after life, and to unite my fate to one who is hateful to me. But—"

"But, dear Edith," replied Strafford, earnestly, "but do you not sacrifice the happiness of your life—though it may seem vanity to say it—if, for any caprice of his, you refuse to unite yourself to one who loves you so deeply, who will always love you, and who will spend his life in the endeavour to make you happy? Nay, more, dear Edith, have you a right to doom him to unhappiness, and to wring his heart through long years of expectation and anxiety?"

He pleaded eagerly, he pleaded long and eloquently, and Edith felt that his words were not without avail. She repeated that, sooner or later, she would be his. She pledged herself to yield to no persuasions, to no threats, to no apprehensions. Step by step he gained much upon her. But she entreated that he would wait; that he would only wait, ere he pressed her farther, till

the period was expired at the end of which her father had announced he would demand her decision.

"Neither press me, Strafford," she said, "nor, I beseech you, say anything of this to any one. I myself will tell my mother, for I know it will be a comfort and a happiness to her, and I cannot bear that she should continue to think that you had left us so abruptly and unreasonably in Germany. Wait only three months, Stafford, and then I will put my reason entirely under the guidance of yours. You shall tell me what I ought to do, how I ought to act. I know that you will be unbiased; I am sure that you will think of what is right, of what is dutiful to do, for her that you love."

"I will indeed, Edith," replied Strafford; "for did I persuade you to do anything but what was right, should I not be injuring myself, Edith?"

"Hark!" she exclaimed, interrupting him; "what is that sound, Strafford?"

"Nothing but the cry of the deer, Edith," he answered, and was going on; but she continued, "Oh, yes, yes; I hear cries as for help, mingling with the sound of the deer!"

Strafford started up and listened. He heard the cries also, and evidently was somewhat surprised and alarmed. "I must go down, Edith," he said; "there is something the matter. Go back to the house, dearest, as fast as possible. The deer are dangerous at this season of the year. We shall find another opportunity to speak more. But remember, dear, dear Edith, you are mine!"

"Hark!" she exclaimed, "there is that cry again. Go, Strafford, go, for Heaven's sake, go;" and Strafford bounded down the hill, turning once as he did so to make himself sure that there was no herd of deer between Edith and the house.

CHAPTER V.

The sounds which had attracted the attention of Edith and Strafford came from the lower ground in the direction of the river, but not precisely from that part to which John Forrest had bent his steps. The voice that called, however, was evidently that of a man, and apparently of a man in great danger or pain. While Strafford ran on as swiftly as possible, the cry was repeated, and seemed much nearer to him than the river; and recollecting a low dingle filled with old hawthorn-trees slightly to the right of the path from the castle to the village, he paused for a single instant to listen, and ascertained at once that it was from thence the cries proceeded. He thought, too, that he recognised the voice of the elder Mr. Forrest; and rushing on as fast as possible, he came to the top of a high bank above the dell, from which he gained an instant view of the terrible scene that was going on below.

A tall stag, with his eyes fiery red, his throat swelled to an enormous size, and his whole look betokening the furious madness which sometimes seizes upon the animal at that season of the year, was standing over an object prostrate before him, which was partly concealed from the eyes of Strafford by the trunk of a fallen hawthorn-tree, and thrusting at it with his horns, the sharp point of one of which was died with gore. Sometimes the thrust was followed by a shrill cry, as if the animal had wounded the living object of its fury: sometimes its horns seemed to strike upon the hawthorn-tree, and do no injury. But the voice that uttered those cries, and the part of the man's dress that was visible, left no doubt upon the mind of Strafford that it was Edith's father who lay there before him; and he sprang down the bank at once, thus drawing the attention of the stag upon himself.

The only weapon that he had about him—for he had come out without his sword—was a common hunting-knife, which he had just time to draw when the mad animal rushed furiously at him. The stag, however, was forced to turn one of the hawthorn-trees in his

course, and Strafford threw himself forward, endeavouring to strike him with the knife in the throat. He missed his footing, however, on one of the slippery roots of the tree, wounding the animal, though not seriously, as he fell, and making him stagger back. Before he could recover his feet, however, the stag was upon him again; and in another moment, in all probability, death would have ended all the hopes, and fears, and anxieties which had been caused by that morning's conversation with Edith, had there not been a loud halloo on the other side of the dell, mingled with the barking of a dog.

These sounds were instantly followed by a fine sheep-dog rushing in upon the stag and flying at his throat. He was gored and cast off in a moment, however, and the beast again turned upon its human assailant. But the appearance of the dog was followed by the appearance of a stout, hale man of six or seven-and-thirty, who rushed on; and at the very moment that the stag was bending to thrust its horns into Strafford as he rose, the new-comer struck the beast a tremendous blow upon the head with the loaded end of a heavy riding-whip, which made him reel and fall partly over. Strafford darted on him almost at the same moment, and threw him down completely, and the next instant the hunting-knife was plunged up to the haft into the furious beast's heart. The other man grasped him tight by the horns, and held his head down to the ground, or even then he would have risen up, and might have injured somebody in the very struggle of death itself.

"You have quieted him, captain, you have quieted him," said the person who had come so opportunely to Strafford's assistance. "I thought he would have killed you."

"So he would, farmer Ball," replied Strafford, holding out his hand to him; "so he would, to a certainty, if it had not been for your assistance."

"Well!" cried the farmer, grasping Strafford's hand, "if I am not happier that I came through the park instead of going round by the road, than I ever was for anything in my life, my name's not Castle Ball. I heard you almost down to the bridge."

"It was not I, farmer," replied Strafford, "and I fear more mischief has been done;" and turning quickly to the spot, about thirty yards off, where he had first seen the stag, he approached, with an anxious and a palpita-

ting heart, the fallen hawthorn-tree, under which Mr. Forrest had in some degree sheltered himself. The sight which he now beheld was not calculated to relieve his apprehensions. The ground was died with blood; for notwithstanding the partial defence which the trunk of the tree afforded, the stag had struck the object of its fury several times, and tremendously lacerated his right shoulder and breast, as well as inflicted a deep wound upon the cheek. His countenance was deadly pale, his eyes closed, and his lips motionless; and Castle Ball demanded, in a low tone, "Is he dead, captain, do you think?"

"I trust not, I trust not," replied Strafford. "Let us instantly remove him to the house, Ball. But first we will tie up the wounds, to prevent this bleeding, which seems to have made him faint."

Thus saying, he knelt down, and drew the almost lifeless form of Mr. Forrest from under the trunk of the tree, and in so doing some movements of the hands and head showed him that the spirit had not absolutely departed. There was a wound on the breast, which seemed the most dangerous, and Strafford feared that the horns of the animal might have penetrated into the chest. But as from it but little blood was flowing, at least externally, the two who had come to his rescue applied themselves to stanch the wounds upon his right arm and shoulder; and then raising him between them, bore him carefully towards the house. As they did so, the pain recalled him to himself, and he looked mournfully up in Strafford's face, saying, in a low tone, "I am hurt, I fear I am very much hurt."

Strafford strove to reassure him, saying, he trusted that, though very much torn and bruised by the horns of the beast, he had received no material injury. Mr. Forrest, however, was not to be comforted. Indeed, the observation is very just, though, of course, not without exceptions, that those who have little faith or trust in the promises of another world, are generally agonized with fear at the thought of quitting this. It is natural, indeed, that it should be so; for if through life we have entertained firm hopes of immortality, those hopes remain, and brighten at the portals of the tomb. But those who have disbelieved and those who have doubted have nothing to cheer them in the dark transition; and if they have had misgivings, those

dreary misgivings last, when all the vanities that covered them have melted away like snow.

Mr. Forrest had through life made little concealment of his skepticism; and now that he fancied himself on the brink of the grave, he felt all the agonies of doubt; doubt which may sometimes be distantly allied to hope, but is always much nearer akin to fear. In answer to Strafford's words of consolation, he only shut his eyes with a shudder, and suffered them to bear him on, while the good-natured voice of Castle Ball commented upon the accident that had occurred, and, without the slightest meaning of offence towards Mr. Forrest, declared that it might have been much worse; thinking solely, as he did so, of the risk which Strafford himself had lately run.

"How the stag got into the park I cannot tell," said Strafford, thoughtfully; "the fallow deer are bad enough at this season of the year, but this beast was worse still. He must have come from the chase, I suppose, though the nearest point is several miles off."

"I rather think, captain," said the farmer, "that honest Tim Meakes and some of his friends have been meddling with the chase more than was prudent. I heard of Tim being up there not long ago with his lurcher, just before the venison season went out; and they said at the time, I remember, that a stag had been driven out of the chase, and that they could never get hold of him."

With a few words thus spoken from time to time, and an occasional pause, they carried Mr. Forrest back towards the house; but, alarmed by the sounds that she had heard, and apprehensive also for him she loved, Edith had been watching at the window, and, ere they reached the esplanade, she darted out and ran towards them. At some distance she recognised the dress of her father, and, clasping her hands together, she paused, exclaiming, "Good God!"

At that moment her feelings were strange and most painful. She recollected that, at the very moment when he was perhaps receiving his death-blow, she herself was, indirectly in words, and straightforwardly in her heart, accusing him of cruel and selfish tyranny both to herself and to her mother. Even now she felt that the accusation was true; but yet reason gave way to tenderness and to pity. She reproached herself for

even admitting such a truth. She thought those very feelings and convictions evil which he himself had forced upon her. She strove to soften her own heart, a heart already all softness and gentleness. She tried to call up any amiable, any gentle trait in her father's character; and might say, in the exquisite words of the poet,

"I've tried
To reckon every artifice of love,
Which, mid my father's waywardness, proclaim'd
His tenderness unalter'd; felt again
The sweet caresses infancy received,
And read the prideful look that made them sweeter;
Have run the old familiar round of things
Indifferent, on which affection hangs
In delicate remembrances, which make
Each household custom sacred; I've recall'd
From memory's never-failing book of pain,
My own neglects of dutiful regard,
Too frequent—all that should provoke a tear—
And all in vain."

But no such caresses had been bestowed upon her infancy; no such pride had shone in her father's eyes upon her; no such remembrances of parental love came, like the softening wind of the South, to melt her heart and bend all her soul to tenderness. She was grieved, pained, anxious, agitated; and she wept. But she wept not as children weep the parents that have nurtured them in love and reared them in affection. She reproached her own heart for its coldness; and, had it been needful to lay down her life for his, she would have done it readily. But she felt that the affection was wanting; that all that moved her was the grief which such an event, happening to any one, might naturally cause, and the habitual sentiment towards him as a parent, which she cultivated studiously in her bosom, but which existed there, amid the innumerable graceful, tender, and affectionate feelings that grew up naturally, like a forced foreign plant, liable to wither every hour, in a garden filled with bright and beautiful indigenous flowers.

The good farmer, Castle Ball, had never beheld her before; but he felt an internal conviction, before a word was spoken, that she was the wounded man's daughter; and he, as well as Strafford, paused when they came up to her.

"Good heavens!" she said, gently taking her father's hand in hers, "I fear you are terribly hurt, sir. What is all this blood? How has all this happened? It is Edith, sir; oh, speak to her!"

The touch of her hand made Mr. Forrest open his eyes; but it was only to turn away from her with a sort of shudder. Edith was pained; deeply, sorrowfully pained by that gesture; but yet she resolved that nothing should prevent her from attending upon him with the same dutiful tenderness as if he had loved her through life with undivided affection.

"He never loved me," she thought: "he never loved me from my birth, because he was disappointed in not having a son." Such was the interpretation which Mrs. Forrest had always put upon her husband's coldness towards his child. "But," continued Edith, in her own thought, "but he may now find that the girl's tenderness in the hour of sickness, and perhaps of death, may be more close, more soothing, more devoted than a man's can, or, perhaps, ought to be."

As she thus thought, Strafford and the good farmer moved on with their burden, she holding Mr. Forrest's hand in hers, and gazing still upon his countenance as they went.

The morning was somewhat advanced, and in the vestibule they met Sir Andrew Stalbrooke himself crossing towards the breakfast-room. He paused with a sudden start, gazed for a moment on Mr. Forrest, and then said, in a low voice, "Bear him this way, as far from the lady's chamber as possible. Wilson," speaking to the servant who had been in the act of throwing open the door for him, "send one of the grooms off instantly for Mr. Marnel, the surgeon. Bid him lose not a moment by the way. Do not speak a word on what has occurred to any one, for fear of the tidings reaching Mrs. Forrest unprepared."

The wounded man looked up with one of his own bitter sneers, saying, in a voice that was scarcely audible from exhaustion, "It will need no great preparation, good sir."

"Women's hearts are sometimes tenderer than we imagine them," said Sir Andrew, in a gentle tone. "This way, Ralph; this way, my dear boy;" and he himself conducted them to a bedchamber in the vicinity of the library, above which it was raised only by three

or four steps. There attendants were summoned, Mr. Forrest placed in bed; and while Sir Andrew Stalbrooke's own valet, who had some knowledge of surgery, applied himself to stanch the wounds, which were still bleeding, the Gentleman of the Old School proceeded himself to Mrs. Forrest's dressing-room, in order to communicate to her the accident which had befallen her husband. Her maid appeared at the door when he knocked; but Mrs. Forrest herself, who was already dressed, met him the moment afterward with a look of surprise and alarm.

"You are surprised to see me, madam," he said, "and judged rightly that I would not have intruded upon you without some matter to communicate. First let me tell you that the accident does not seem so severe as was at first supposed."

"Edith! Edith!" exclaimed Mrs. Forrest, clasping her hands in agony.

"Is quite, is perfectly well," interrupted Sir Andrew, before she could add more.

"Thank God for that!" replied Mrs. Forrest, with a look of inexpressible relief. "That would have been the last blow, and would have ended life. Who is it that is hurt? my husband?"

"Even so, madam," replied Sir Andrew: "but I hope and trust that the accident will not prove severe, and perhaps you had better not go to him just at present."

"He is my husband, Sir Andrew," replied Mrs. Forrest, weeping with very mingled emotions. "He is my husband, and I must go to him; I will shrink from no duty, I have never shrunk from my duty. The memory of old affection, too," she added, weeping more bitterly, "will come up, and I must not be absent from his bed of pain and sickness."

Sir Andrew Stalbrooke immediately offered her his hand, and led her down towards the room where her husband lay. As soon as they reached it, he beckoned his nephew, Castle Ball, and the servants out of the room, and left the husband and wife and daughter together, merely saying, "A surgeon is sent for, Mrs. Forrest, and every attendance that the house can afford waits but your commands."

The lady bowed her head; and Sir Andrew, leading the way into the neighbouring room, demanded eagerly how the accident, which had produced such terrible re-

sults, had occurred. In a few brief words Strafford explained the facts to him, while Castle Ball stood with his stalworth form erect, and his arms crossed upon his broad chest, his hat hanging under one elbow, and the serviceable riding-whip depending from the other, while his eyes were fixed with a sort of respectful and affectionate eagerness upon the countenance of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke as Strafford went on.

"You would certainly, my dear uncle," said Strafford, "have lost a nephew if it had not been for my good friend, farmer Ball here, for he assuredly saved my life. I had no defence whatever from the beast, and his horns would have been in my breast in another moment but for the tremendous blow he hit him just behind the ears."

Sir Andrew shook the farmer warmly by the hand. "You and yours have been my tenants from generation to generation, Castle Ball," he said, "and you are running up a long account against us; for you have found many a means of doing us a service, when I know of none that we ever did you."

"God bless you, sir, God bless you!" replied the farmer, shaking his hand warmly in return; "you have been a good landlord, and a good friend, and a good example to all the country round. Isn't that service enough for one man to do in his day? But I must go down," he added, "as fast as I can to see after my poor bitch Jenny. She got an awful poke from that beast's horns; and though it's but right to think of the Christian first, I mustn't forget the poor dog either."

"That is right, that is right, Ball," replied Strafford; "I will go down with you too, and see the place, if I can be of no farther service here, and will be up before breakfast is ready. I should like to break the tidings to young Forrest, who is still down at the river."

Almost as he spoke, however, the door of the library opened, and John Forrest himself was ushered in by a servant, who had evidently told him all that he knew of the events of the morning. There was a formal air of gloom upon the young man's countenance, and he listened with patient silence while the whole story was told to him over again; interrupting it with commonplace expressions of surprise and dismay, and at the end saying, with a tone of consideration and anxiety, that he thought he had better not go in to disturb his

uncle, as Mrs. Forrest and Edith were already with him.

"I knew," he said, "that it is the most dangerous thing in the world, under such circumstances, to be too much agitated and excited."

It is wonderful how completely, at moments like these, self-love changes its character, and becomes one of the most considerate, thoughtful, and disinterested of human motives. Few, I believe, too few, really shrink from visiting a sick bed for fear of agitating the person that lies upon it. Yet how many are there, who persuade themselves and others that such are their motives for avoiding scenes, painful, distressing, or disagreeable! Sir Andrew Stalbrooke turned away, and looked out of the window; Captain Strafford accompanied Castle Ball in search of the dog; and after having remained musing for a decent length of time, John Forrest sauntered into the breakfast-room, where he remained till Sir Andrew and Strafford joined him.

The surgeon came as speedily as possible, and, after careful examination, declared that the wounds Mr. Forrest had received did not affect any vital part, but that the excessive laceration and bruises might produce very serious consequences. John Forrest did make up his mind to visit his uncle in the course of the day, and remained with him for some time. The only other event which took place, worthy of being recorded here, during the course of that day, was the arrival of a note from Lady Mallory, who, in ignorance of what had occurred, declared her readiness, though not quite recovered, to receive her relations on the following morning.

"You had better ride over, Ralph," said Sir Andrew, "and inform Lady Mallory of the accident; though most likely you will not see her. Perhaps Mr. Forrest may like to accompany you."

"No, I thank you, Sir Andrew," replied John Forrest; "I think not, if I am not likely to see her fair ladyship. I am rather inclined to roam about your pretty village and its neighbourhood."

Sir Andrew bowed stiffly, and the matter dropped.

CHAPTER VI.

It was on the evening of the day, the commencement of which we have dwelt upon so long, that a very young and very pretty girl sat in the little parlour of a neat cottage in the neighbourhood of Stalbrooke, with her eyes buried in her hands, and the tears from time to time forcing their way through the small delicate fingers, and dropping on the table which supported her. The cottage, both on the outside and on the inn, was peculiarly neat; the flooring, which was of board, was as white as snow; the table, though made of harder wood and highly polished, bore no speck or stain in any part. In one corner of the room stood that most convenient and ornamental of all pieces of cottage furniture, called a corner cupboard, the shelves of which displayed a number of little articles of ornament or taste—small china cups, red Indian slippers, some Japanese gods, and moccasins from the far North. Opposite to it, again, was the no less useful and ornamental house clock, an indifferent spectator of joys and woes, ticking forth its slow accustomed tune, which suffered no interruption but from an occasional discordant grumble once in the week, when it was wound up on Saturday night. Besides these articles of furniture, which might be found in many other cottages of the same class, there was another much more rare, in the form of a bookcase, displaying upon its shelves a curious collection of volumes, which showed some oddity, perhaps, but some taste in the collector. One of the first in bulk and importance was the old folio edition of Shakspeare, in a binding the colour of black oak, and with paper which had lost all semblance of whiteness. Dryden, and Beaumont and Fletcher, too, were there; a translation of Astrea into French, four or five stray volumes of history, two or three French books, and a French Dictionary, Sir Thomas Browne's Vulgar Errors, and Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy. Prior's works, too, were there; and so was Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia; close by which stood two volumes of old Sermons, and Jeremy Taylor's Holy Living and Dying. On the top

of the bookcase was a little jug filled with flowers; but, alas! they were now beginning to wither; for neither the flowers themselves, nor the water which was to keep them fresh, had been renewed for several days.

The girl who sat at the table weeping, as we have described her, was perhaps eighteen years of age, of a brown complexion, with large, speaking, dark eyes, and hair of a rich, warm brown. She might have passed well, in short, for the personification of the nut-brown maid. Her movements and her demeanour were always graceful, though somewhat wild, quick, and fawn-like. But now the quick spirit was quelled, and she sat silent and alone in her desolate home, with some of those articles of mourning which she was forcing herself to make, cast down, as if in a fit of despair, on the table before her. The dress that she wore at this moment, her mourning not being ready, was not without taste, though perhaps somewhat fantastic; but it seemed to have been but little attended to in that moment of grief; and the sort of shepherdess air, which it at other times displayed, was now altogether gone.

The brown hair fell over the small hand that covered her eyes, and in vain she cast it back; for, like the thoughts of her sorrow, it returned again the moment after, and would not be restrained.

The cause of the renewed grief of poor Lucy Williams at that moment was, that the undertaker had, within the last hour, brought home her father's coffin and placed him in it, and the image of death was thus more vividly obtruded on her mind. It is true that the frail clay is nothing when the spirit has departed. It is true, when the beams from heaven, which lighted up our earthly tenement, have passed away for ever, and the deserted house is ready to fall into ruins, that then the blow—the real blow—has been struck, the bitterness is past, the friend is gone never to return, and the place is thenceforth vacant. But still the mortal and the immortal, linked together, derive their associations from perishable things. When we look upon the vacant seat, the form that used to fill it rises to our eyes; and the soul's tabernacle even, falling into ruins after the departure of its tenant, is dear to the heart, as the abode of what we loved: we are bound to it by the memory of many bright expressions, looks of love, tones of affection; we cling to it as the last remnant

that is left us of a thing so dear; and when we see it about to descend into the dull cold earth, it is the breaking of the last bond, the tearing the last seal off the highest, the noblest, the dearest of human affections.

Oh, how solitary was the heart of Lucy Williams, even before that time! Oh, how strongly did she feel, when her father's last breath was drawn, the weakness, the vanity, the emptiness of much that she had thought most dear, and bright, and beautiful! Oh, how the aspect of the world, and all that it contained, was changed to her by the dull shadow of that dark cloud! Oh, how deeply she experienced the mortality, not only of man, but of joy! But when the sad preparations began for conveying to the dull bosom of the ground the cold remains of him with whom the remembrance of every hour of life was entwined, it was then that she felt lonely and desolate, dark and deserted indeed. As long as in that adjoining room she could go and gaze upon the still, calm features of the dead, and her bright and eager fancy might light them up with the looks that they were wont to bear, there seemed something left, something nearer, something not wholly desperate in her situation. But the sight of the coffin, the preparation for man completing what the Almighty had begun, the sound of harsh ungrieving voices as they went about the awful task, had brought over her spirit the chillness, the icy chillness, of utter destitution, not of the body, but of the heart. Oh, how she wept! and, though the village girl, who had acted as the servant of her father and herself, looked in from time to time after the undertakers had gone away, and would fain have spoken a word of comfort, yet Lucy wept still, or only made a sign to be left alone.

It was at that moment, however, that awful moment, that, after some muttered sounds in the passage, the door opened, and another person appeared, perhaps the last on earth that Lucy could have wished to see; for he was one who could have no sympathy with such feelings as at that moment filled her bosom; he was one from whose heart even grief itself, and deep misfortune, could extract nothing generous. He has been before the reader's eyes already, in the first person we have described in this book; and the cottage which he now entered was the spot towards which, in reality,

he had turned his horse's head when he quitted the high road, as we have before detailed.

On entering the little cottage parlour, his countenance assumed a look of grief, which any eye well accustomed to the world's hypocrisy would scarcely have needed two glances to recognise as proceeding from no real emotion of the heart, but from some selfish purpose, or from some worldly custom. He was quite dissembler enough, however, to deceive poor Lucy Williams. He had been oftentimes before the guest of that cottage: her dead father, who had been somewhat fantastic and enthusiastic, had formerly been an inferior master at the school where Forrest was brought up; and in after years Forrest, in one of his fly-fishing excursions, finding his old usher in the village schoolmaster, had found also attractions in the daughter's beauty, which made him affect a fondness to the father for her sake. She had seemed lonely and unprotected, a fitting prey for the heartless like himself; and every time when opportunity, or idleness, or satiety of the pleasures of the capital, brought him into the country, he would wander from the open course to the small village of Stalbrooke, and spend a day or two in the endeavour to amuse the father and betray the child. He had contrived, also, to take advantage of the careless thoughtlessness of the poor schoolmaster's disposition, in order to lay him under some pecuniary obligations; and Lucy had felt grateful, both for the assistance which he had thus rendered to one who was so dear to her, and for the delight and gratification which her father experienced from his occasional society.

Of late, however, John Forrest had lost no opportunity of endeavouring to corrupt her mind. He had sought to persuade her that vice was virtue, and virtue vice. He had sought to confound and distort her ideas of good and evil; and seeing in a moment those qualities of her mind which he might most easily bend to his purpose, he assailed her through her imagination, and strove to lull her virtue asleep in sweet dreams of poetry and visions of romance.

But there were two things wanting to the success of his plans: he himself, though largely read in the poetry both of his own country and of several others, though there was scarcely a passage of great beauty

or merit in any eminent writer that he had not made his own, and could apply as best suited his purposes, had not the true spirit of poetry in his heart. He had been guided by a good taste, and was aided by a strong memory, to collect, adapt, and reproduce the thoughts and expressions of others: but the spirit, the essence, was wanting; and Lucy Williams, while she listened, and perhaps admired, still had upon her mind the vague impression that she hearkened to a sweet-tongued sophist, and associated with him without that full conviction of his truth and sincerity which it was necessary for his purposes that she should receive. The second thing that was wanting, perhaps, to the success of the seducer, was that the heart of his intended victim should be entirely free; that there should be none upon whom she might turn her eyes, and draw a comparison unfavourable to him.

Thus, when, on his last two visits to the village, he had found opportunities, while her father was occupied, to scoff more scornfully at those things which he called prejudices, but which she considered principles, instead of tending to corrupt, his words served but to put her on her guard; and although from her very innocence she did not understand the full tendency and object of all he said, yet his language created wonder, and alarm, and doubt, and she would instantly have told the whole to her father, had she not feared to destroy at once that connexion between him and young Forrest, which was the old schoolmaster's pride and delight.

She resolved to avoid, as far as possible, all meeting with one whom she doubted and in some degree feared. She went even farther; and when, on his last visit, he had spoken to her with fiery words that increased her doubts and apprehensions, she had endeavoured to chill him with icy coldness, and mistakenly thought she had succeeded. She knew not how persevering and unyielding is human vanity; she knew not, that by piquing that of one so completely given up to it, she urged him forward in the very pursuit which she sought to check. John Forrest, however, did not believe that she was really cold towards him. He was too well satisfied with himself in every respect to understand fully that such could be the case. He thought that she only affected such things; that his success was certain, though her eagerness, as he termed it, might make the triumph

less easy; and to render his hold upon her still stronger than he fancied that his arts had yet made it, he voluntarily offered to lend the unhappy schoolmaster, whose health was then beginning to decline, a larger sum than he had given before, provided Lucy would sign the promise to pay it, *merely as a form*, he said.

The father was ill at the moment, and in some distress. He saw no danger; Lucy obeyed his will; and the paper was signed. Forrest, the period of whose stay in the country had by that time expired, returned to London, believing that he had Lucy in his power; and now, having heard of her father's illness and death, he came prepared to take advantage of opportunity.

Lucy rose when she saw him enter the room, and wiped the tears hastily from her eyes. Her first feelings towards him, indeed, were such as he might have been well pleased to see. He had been the friend, and, as she believed, the benefactor of her father; of that father whom she now mourned in sadness and in solitude. All the pleasure that her dead parent had found in his society; all the pride which he had taken in the thought of his former pupil visiting him, sitting with him for hours, listening to all his jests, taking part in all his wild and visionary speculations; all the confidence which he had reposed in him, presented objects sweet and touching to her mind as connected with John Forrest, and her first emotions were gratitude and pleasure. The melancholy, too, expressed by his countenance, so sympathetic with what was proceeding in her own heart, was all in his favour; and when he took her hand gently in his, and with studied and artful words condoled with her upon her loss, she was almost inclined to forget all that had pained and alarmed her in his former conduct, and to believe that in him she had a friend indeed. He sat down by her, he soothed her, he assumed the whole air and appearance of deep grief; he offered some apologies even for intruding upon her in her moments of sorrow, and he assigned as the cause, that some time before her father had written to him to ask the loan of a small sum of money, and that he feared she might be under some inconvenience for want of it.

She assured him that such was not the case; that every one had been very kind to her, and that she wanted nothing. She thanked him, however, warmly for his

consideration; and though he was sorry to hear that there were many who had come forward to befriend her, he only expressed himself the more ardent to serve her, to relieve her of all pain, to remove from her all anxiety. His words grew warmer, his looks alarmed her, and Lucy drew back from his near approach with all her apprehensions returning. She heard a slight sound in the adjoining passage, and hoped even that it was some one coming in to break through an interview which was each minute becoming painful.

Nobody, however, approached, and he went on. He spoke of love, and of passion, and of casting off the restraints and considerations of the world; and he proposed to her even almost immediately to quit the calm and happy village in which she dwelt, and to fly with him to London, there, as he expressed it, to be adored and idolized, and to live in pleasure and in brightness all the day long. We must not dwell upon his words, or upon the scene that took place; pictures of the heart's depravity are always painful, and should ever be traced in broad lines.

Lucy was pained, and grieved, and terrified, and indignant. She rose to call the servant girl; but the girl was absent, and he again took her hand and drew her back into the room. Still the memory of her father, still the memory of what Forrest had done for him, prevented her from speaking all she felt; but she besought him wildly and eagerly to leave her; she entreated him with tears not to insult her sorrow; and at length, when he still went on protesting, soliciting, urging her with every base entreaty, she suddenly drew her hand from the grasp in which he held it, and then, with the wild but not ungraceful vehemence which often characterized her, she clasped his arm with her hand without reply, and drew him towards the door which led into the inner chamber.

Forrest was surprised, and knew not what she meant; but he followed where she led, and in another moment stood by the side of the bed of death. The coffin lay upon it, as yet not screwed down; the countenance of the dead man, calm, still, rigid, was before their eyes; while the curtains, in great part drawn around the bed, cast upon it a grayer shade, a more ashy hue than even death itself.

The sight of her father's face for a moment made

Lucy pause, and the tears rushed up into her eyes; but the next instant she recovered herself, drew up her head, let go the arm of her companion, and pointing to the features of the dead, she said,

"Mr. Forrest, you professed friendship for that dear father who lies there; whose heart was as pure and as noble as if he had been born in ranks as high or higher than your own. You professed friendship for him; you professed friendship for me; if that friendship was true for either the one or the other, talk not to me base words within a step of my honest father's corpse; break not the heart that is nearly broken, by making me think that there is not one honest and true friend left. Let me tell you, sir, let me tell you, that I would sooner stand here, and, looking on my dead parent, see the corruption that must soon come upon that form, creep over it shade by shade, and the worm itself revel on the cheek of him that I loved best, than I would feel the corruptions of your words come over my mind, or a fouler worm than that of the grave. Hear me, sir, hear me," she continued, seeing that he was about to interrupt her, "hear me out; for you have spoken, and I have been silent too long. You professed friendship to my father and friendship to me; if either was sincere, leave me, fly from me; let me never behold you again till you can bring your mind to believe that honesty and virtue may even be in a cottage girl like myself. But if your professions were all false, and if you have come here so frequently with the sole hope of seducing an unprotected girl, and destroying the happiness of a home that was once bright, let me call to your mind that the time must come, and is not far distant, when you shall lie like him, whom you now see before you, with your earthly frame going down to cold corruption, and your immortal spirit gone to answer before the judgment-seat of God, where my father's spirit may be your accusing angel, and call for retribution on your head."

For a few moments the man she spoke to was struck and silenced, and he turned partly as if to quit the chamber; but the next instant he thought, "Shall I be frustrated by a girl like this? shall her idle words by the side of a dead mass of what was once animated matter—shall they leave me without a voice, and send me away like a whipped schoolboy?"

Vanity triumphed in an instant. There seemed to him something fine and startling in the very idea of overcoming what he called idle scruples, and bending Lucy to his will, even in the presence of the dead; and he instantly turned to her again.

By this time, however, the vehemence, the dignity, the energy with which she had spoken, had passed away; her eyes were fixed upon her dead father's face; memory had run back to the past, energy had given way to sorrow, and the fire was drowned out in tears.

"I grieve extremely," said Forrest, once more taking her hand, "I grieve extremely to have agitated you, but—"

"Leave me, sir, leave me!" said Lucy Williams; "leave me, if you have any pity in your nature! leave me, if you are a gentleman! leave me, if you are a man!"

"No, indeed, I cannot leave you thus," replied Forrest; "I cannot leave you thus in deep affliction, and with my own heart wrung and hopeless with your coldness; indeed, indeed, I cannot, and I will not leave you thus."

"Because, sir, you are not a man!" said a voice behind the seducer; and, at the same time, a hand was laid upon his arm, which forcibly detached his grasp from Lucy Williams.

Forrest turned fiercely round in a moment; but it was the calm, dignified countenance of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke that met his eyes, looking full upon him with a stern and reproving glance. "Because, sir," said the baronet, "because, sir, you are not a man; for if you were either a gentleman or a man, as the poor girl herself has said, you would have ceased such language, and left her long ago."

"Sir, you insult me," exclaimed young Forrest, laying his hand upon his sword, and, in the excitement of the moment, forgetting all restraint.

"Insult you!" exclaimed Sir Andrew Stalbrooke. "Think, sir, what it is that you have yourself insulted! You have insulted innocence and goodness in that poor girl. You have insulted your God in the presence of the dead whom he has called to himself; and, humble and lowly as I am in such comparisons, you have insulted also me, by daring to issue forth from under my roof to injure and to aggrieve those who, living happily and

virtuously under my protection and on my lands, are to me as my own children."

"Sir," replied Forrest, fiercely, "it is lucky for you that you are an old man, otherwise I should take instant means to make you eat such words."

"Not so old a man, sir," replied Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, in the same calm, severe tone, "not so old a man as not to scourge you from the door of this cottage like an ill-conditioned cur, if you do not instantly quit it without offending the ears of any here present by another word;" and so saying, he grasped the young man's arm firmly, and pushed him towards the door.

Forrest's sword was drawn in an instant, and poor Lucy Williams started forward to cast herself between them; but, overpowered by all that had passed, she fell fainting on the floor. At the same moment, however, from behind the closed curtains on the other side of the bed ran forward the woman Philippina, with her bright black eyes flashing with living fire. Ere she could come round, however, or call for help, Sir Andrew Stalbrooke's sword was also drawn, and with ease and grace that might have shamed many a youth of daily practice in the schools of defence, he crossed it with that of Forrest, parried two quick lunges, and almost in an instant disarmed his adversary.

"Take up your sword, sir, and begone," he said, with a somewhat cutting smile. "Courage, sir, is a good quality: and I am happy to see you possess it; for your conduct here to-day towards a poor girl who could not defend herself, made me doubt that you did so. I have only farther to say, that, as my chance guest at this moment, if this unpleasant occurrence is at all spoken of, it shall not be my fault. But in the village of Stalbrooke I must insist that you do not set your foot again; and, trusting that you are both ashamed and repentant of your conduct here, I wish you a good-evening for the present, and shall meet you at supper as if this had not occurred."

Young Forrest stooped, and slowly raised his sword from the ground, thrust it back into the scabbard, and, with a bright spot on his cheek, his brow knit, and his teeth set, made a dogged inclination of the head to Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, and quitted the cottage.

"Not a word of this business, Philippina!" said Sir Andrew; "I mean as far as this quarrel is concerned.

You may tell any one how well this poor child has behaved, for that ought to be known. You did quite right also yourself to send for me up to the farm, when you knew what was going on; though I do not quite approve of your hiding yourself behind the curtains till I came."

Philippina explained that she had done it for poor Lucy Williams's own sake; and Sir Andrew, satisfied that she had meant well, bade her either take the orphan girl home with her, or stay with her there till after the funeral; and, leaving Lucy in her hands, he took his way back on foot by the village towards his own dwelling.

CHAPTER VII.

The most obnoxious and irritating thing which an ordinary critic can meet with, and which excites his fury more than anything else on earth, is that constant change of scene and character which it is sometimes convenient to adopt in the beginning of a work like the present, where, in order to avoid a change from personage to personage, afterward when the reader's interest is particularly excited in favour of any of them, it is necessary to bring each individual in turn before the eye, ere the mind has become much interested in any of them at all. The ordinary critic is naturally enraged at this, inasmuch as it is part of his trade to speak learnedly of a book that he has not read; and consequently, where the spot and the person are frequently changed, it is much more difficult to get that superficial view of the whole which is necessary to his purpose, than in works where the narrative plods quietly on, suffering one event to drag on another to the end of the tale. He naturally swears to the public, then, that the book is a mere phantasmagoria of detached scenes, that the characters are introduced without any reference to each other, and that the incidents do not at all tend to the general progress of the story. He swears all this, and perhaps believes it; because he neither gives himself time, nor takes the trouble, nor possesses the inclination, to examine the links of con-

nexion between the various characters, to trace the minute steps by which each incident hurries on the advance of the whole tale; and because, in all probability, he has not a mind of sufficient capacity to view the matter as a whole, even if he had time, industry, or inclination.

Trusting, however, that the intelligent reader will not suffer himself to be misled, and will remember, that though it is a melancholy sight to see a blind man led, even by a dog that can see, there is a still more lamentable thing daily to be observed in matters of literature, that is to say, a man who can see, led by a blind dog. Trusting that the reader will remember this, we shall proceed, for the fourth time, to carry him into new scenes and among new characters; and doubt not that it will be believed we do so for certain ends and purposes well considered in reference to the general progress of the story.

About a mile and a half from the village of Stalbrooke, on the side which lay farthest from the high road, was a wide open common, covered with furze bushes and heath, broken by old gravel pits, and interspersed with little shining pools of water. This heath swept round at one extremity till it reached the park of good Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, from which it was separated by a high stone wall. It extended on the other hand to a distance of three or four miles, and crept up the hills which formed the boundary of the county in that direction. In the days of which we speak, the high roads of Great Britain, as well as of every other country in Europe, were, in comparison with those of the present day, few, tortuous, and remote from each other, and the parish roads still fewer. The country on either side of one of the highways might be highly cultivated and well peopled; but in proportion as you diverged from the stright course, between one large town and another, you came into tracts where the population was more thin, the communication more difficult, and the care of man more scantily bestowed upon the soil. There are people still living, or at least were within ten years, who can remember the time when the person who wished to go from Reading to Oxford had no choice but a journey on horseback or a round of many miles; and the country to the right or left of every highway was very much in the situation of the heathy

track which we have just mentioned; that is to say, almost utterly destitute of any regular and well-maintained path.

Various traces, indeed, winding along with serpent-like meanderings over the face of the moor, marked where travellers or beasts turned out to graze, had been led by instinct or habit to follow the same track that others had followed before them; and there was likewise a road of a kind and description now almost utterly lost and forgotten, but which deserves to be recorded in this place. It was a small, sandy track, never above six feet broad, and sometimes less, which, on the flatter parts of the moor that it traversed, seemed to owe its origin to chance, and not to the handiwork of man; but which in other spots, where the ground rose considerably, was proved to be the effect of labour and design, by being cut straight on, deep through the sandy banks, which rose high above it, and in some places almost canopied it over with shrubs and leaves, the yellow flowering gorse and broom, the wild honeysuckle, and the eglantine. For the distance of between twenty and thirty miles, that narrow road wound on, displaying throughout its course the peculiar and distinctive characteristic which marked it out from all other roads, except five or six in very distant parts of the country. This characteristic was, that it avoided, as if with scrupulous care, every village, and town, and hamlet. But the name which it bore—and which similar roads bore in different parts of England up to a very late period—serves to point out the awful cause of this peculiarity. It was called the Plague road; and had been constructed at the time when, in the seventeenth century, the terrible pestilence which nearly decimated this country, raged in the highest degree. At that time a great part of the traffic of the country was carried on by means of pack-horses; and the carriers in various places cut these roads for themselves, for the purpose of going from one point of their course to the other without being forced to stop at any of the intermediate towns or villages where the plague might be supposed to be raging. The terrible circumstances under which it had been constructed had long passed away at the time of our tale, and the Plague road had fallen a good deal into disuse; but it still afforded a pleasant ride to the yeomen and the gentry in the neighbourhood,

though the pack-horses of the carriers no longer stalked heavily along it, and the tortuous means of communication which it had once afforded was supplied by a more direct way.

Upon the very edge of this road, very nearly in the centre of the common, stood a group of five trees, with underneath them a little patch of ground rescued from the waste, carefully and neatly cultivated with long rows of cabbages, onions, and other culinary herbs; a nice white fence circling the whole about; and a remarkably neat house, of two stories high, sheltering itself directly under the green branches, amid which it sent up the white smoke of its turf fires. At the spot where the road passed by this house, it had just emerged from a deep sandy gorge, through which it had been cut, and issued out upon the flat ground. The lower part of the house was thus shaded to the eastward by the rise through which the road plunged, but the upper windows commanded a view of the whole of its course in that direction; while on the other side was seen, wide spread out before it, the bare face of the brown moor.

This house, thus well situated as a place of observation, was inhabited by a personage of a very singular character; and we may at once present him to the reader's eyes, as he sat in his little parlour looking over the moor, taking his glass of rum and water—which, it is necessary to remark, was extremely weak—on the same evening of which we have just been speaking in the last chapter.

He was a man of about five feet eleven in height, some fifty years of age, spare but not exactly meager in form, with a weather-beaten countenance, and hair which had once been of a reddish brown, gathering into small gray curls about his head. His hands were large and strong, his arms and legs muscular, and his chest deep; but through the middle of his left hand was a hole surrounded by a deep blackened scar, and the two middle fingers of that hand were stiff and immoveable. His countenance, though the features were not handsome, was good and frank, and there was an immense deal of intelligence and character about his quick gray eye. He was dressed in a coat of velveteen, which had once been of a darkish green, but now, by exposure to the sun, had acquired a yellow hue; and, contrary to the custom of the times, which wrapped up men's

necks in the most enormous swaddling clothes, his throat and even part of his chest were bare.

Although he sat alone, as far as the absence of every other human being was concerned, yet he by no means wanted companions; for there was a small white terrier at his feet; something which looked prodigiously like a lurcher curled up in a corner of the room; five bird-cages, tenanted by goldfinches and linnets, gracing the sides of the window; a ferret rolled up in an old stocking at the end of the table, making itself as comfortable as it could under such circumstances; and a spaniel bitch, with her litter of puppies, in the place which, had it been winter, would have been occupied by the fire.

From one to another of these animals wandered the eye of the master of the house from time to time, with a look of affection and satisfaction; and they, on their parts, seemed instinctively to know when they each attracted his attention. The terrier looked up and pricked its ears; the birds came down to the bottoms of their cages, and thrust their bills through the wires; and the lurcher raised his gray eyebrow, and slightly wagged the tip of his tail.

Such, then, was the personage to whom tihs house belonged, absolutely and entirely, as his own freehold. But his history must be dwelt upon for a moment. In early life he had been a wildish lad in the village of Stalbrooke; and his father, who was the miller there, and well to do in the world, used to treat his son Timothy with a degree of harshness which Timothy was not inclined to endure. He accordingly enlisted in a regiment destined immediately for foreign service; and went out to see the world, and to try the smiles of the fickle goddess. He proved a brave and gallant soldier; received various wounds, of which the musket-ball through the hand was one; and might have gradually gone on by various degrees of promotion, till he had even mounted the epaulette, had it not been for a certain sort of inherent fondness for the beasts of the field, which somewhat interfered with the regular discharge of his military duties. He had every quality on earth for a good soldier but one. He was brave, active, clever, obedient, respectful, quick in thought and in deed, cleanly in his person and his habits almost to foppery, boasting that his general had more often a

dirty shirt on than he had; and with a certain degree of shrewdness and clear-headedness which made him invaluable as a non-commissioned officer. He submitted to discipline without the slightest murmur; but the unfortunate point of his character was, that if there was a bird, or beast, or fish, to be caught, shot, or hunted, from a rat to a rattlesnake, from a tortoise to a tiger, Tim Meakes could not resist it, let the time and circumstances be what they would. Indeed, all his comrades and friends applied to him, and none but him, on such occasions; for, whether by a long conversation with birds, and beasts, and creeping things, he had acquired an intimate knowledge of their characters; or, by a peculiar instinct derived from nature, had a sort of sympathetic intelligence with the brute creation; or by some metempsychosical process he had been passed in succession through the bodies of every animal under the sun, and retained a recollection of the changes, he was certainly far better aware of what any given beast would do, under particular circumstances, than the beast itself. It was natural, therefore, that he should love to deal with things whereof he had so intimate a knowledge: it was natural, too, that his companions should constantly call for his aid, when they had anything to do with that part of the creation over which he seemed to exercise a superior influence: and these circumstances, during the six-and-twenty years that he remained in the service, and of which he had passed seventeen or eighteen in India, brought him into various difficulties, from which he would have found great trouble in extricating himself had it not been for his excellent character in every other respect.

He thus, therefore, remained in an inferior rank; but, nevertheless, he contrived to acquire, by care and forethought, a very tolerable pittance, to enable him to return to his native country in comfort. That pittance was increased by a share of the property of his father, who just lived to see his son return; and buying a small patch of freehold ground, which happened to lie in the very midst of the common, Tim Meakes, with his own hands and very little assistance, reclaimed the land, fenced it from the waste, built the house, made the furniture, and established himself as we have described.

His household consisted, besides himself and his beast associates, of an old woman, who had been the

maid of the mill when he enlisted for a soldier. She could cook his dinner, and was some ten years older than himself, so that there was no scandal. A farming boy helped in the garden; and, though shrewd enough underneath, was as stupid upon the surface as heart could desire.

These were all the tenants of the place; and Tim Meakes would have lived a very happy and peaceful life, had it not been that his old propensity towards the beasts of the field did not suffer him to be long in his native land without plunging him into the perils of poaching. To say the truth, the peril was not the part of the business that Tim Meakes liked the least; for he was of an adventurous disposition, and required a little excitement; fond of an enterprise of almost any kind, and always prompt to mingle with it that degree of gay jocularity which hides from our own eyes, as well as those of others, the dangers that surround us, better than any other deception of the human heart.

The farmers, to a man, loved Tim Meakes, and gave him every sort of facility, if not assistance; and at first even the lords of the neighbouring manors, perhaps, would have looked over his malpractices, if they had not found out that Meakes's skill and example rendered the other poachers in the neighbourhood ten thousand times more destructive and impudent. But the old soldier proved too keen for them, even when they did attempt to punish him: and though he had been three times brought up before the late Lord Mallory, who would certainly have sent him once more across the seas if he had found the means, and twice before Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, whose suppressed smile, as his old acquaintance appeared in his presence, gave Meakes every sort of confidence, no proof so distinct as to convict the amateur poacher could be brought forward against him, and he still continued to live on, ever in the practice of manifold suspicious walks and the possession of manifold unlawful dogs. After going on in this state for some time, Tim Meakes acquired a sort of prescriptive right to poach in the neighbourhood. Lord Mallory's keeper having been provoked into some act towards him rather beyond the letter of the law, Meakes thrashed him within an inch of his life in the open market-place of the neighbouring town; and this feat caused him to be held in but the greater reverence

by everybody but Lord Mallory himself, who, dying shortly after, was obliged to put off, *sine die*, the persecution that he was preparing for the termagant old soldier.

Besides this degree of license which he had acquired for himself by the valour of his invincible arm, there were a good many pieces of extra-manorial land, and one small farm in the hands of its own proprietor, over which the lord of the manor could not make his right of sporting good. Liked as he was by the farmers and some of the smaller country gentlemen, these possessions, as far as the game went, naturally fell under the paternal care of Timothy Meakes, who tacked Esquire to his name for the nonce, and boldly asserted that he had a qualification. It thus happened that Meakes had an opportunity of obliging any of his inferior neighbours with a day's shooting or fishing; and his name became so renowned in these respects, that occasionally a person of greater importance still would place himself under his guidance or tuition, in order to obtain the better sport; and this particular circumstance of his situation brings us to the precise point whereat and through which he is connected with this tale.

As he was sitting there in his mansion, calmly sipping the weak rum and water, in a small portion of which he indulged every afternoon instead of tea or coffee, meditating deeply of a sweet nide of young pheasants, which he had seen under the wings of their mother, close by a hazel bush in one of the outlying copses of Lady Mallory; revolving, for a change of thought, sundry old buck hares that frequented the barley fields, and even a stray bustard—one of the last in England—which he had seen upon the high downs above; as he sat thus, we say, with his eyes now turned to the lurcher, now to the spaniel, now to the ferret that writhed in the stocking, and between whiles to the window which looked over the common, he perceived the figure of a gentleman walking along the Plague road, slowly and meditatively, in the direction of his own house.

The sharp eye of Timothy Meakes instantly recognised an old acquaintance before he could see a feature of his face, and calling to the worthy lady who superintended his kitchen, he told her to bring another glass and some more cold water, while he himself quietly

walked to the door, and opened it, to give admittance to the expected visiter. As soon as the guest reached the gate of his garden, Meakes held out his hand to him, shaking his head with a somewhat rueful and reproachful air, and saying, "Ah, Mr. Forrest, Mr. Forrest, you missed as fine a fish there this morning as ever I saw in all my life. Why, you didn't give him time to pouch, sir. I was watching you from the bank above, and you struck in a minute; and such a stroke, too, that you had not even a chance of hooking him by accident. It's all very well, sir, with a carp, or any sly fish like that, to give it a leetle stroke; a leetle stroke, you see, as soon as you see the float bob. But, bless you, that will never do with such a fish as a pike, who is, in comparison to a carp, just what a soldier is to a lawyer. I don't wonder you look downcast and heavy-like."

"Ah," replied Forrest, sullenly, "I've got more cause to look downcast and heavy than that, Meakes. I've been made a fool of by a girl, and an old prig hard by, and I sha'n't lay my head down in peace till I've found some way of conquering the one and punishing the other."

Meakes looked grave, but he nevertheless pressed Forrest into his house, set the glass and the bottle before him, from which the young lawyer did not fail to drink plentifully, of somewhat stronger beverage than the old soldier; and then Meakes, after falling into a revery for some minutes, contrived to draw forth from his guest a full and particular account of the whole of his proceedings of that afternoon, at least according to the light in which Forrest chose to paint them. There was something about the old soldier which prevented his companion from displaying in plain words the nature of his design upon poor Lucy Williams. He represented her simply as a coquettish jilt, who had first given him every reason to believe that she loved him, and then, as he termed it, turned the cold shoulder upon him. Sir Andrew Stalbrooke he represented as interfering impertinently, and "marring matters that he could not mend;" and he dwelt vaguely upon some whirling schemes for revenging himself, in the execution of which he seemed to ask and to hope for Meakes's assistance.

The old soldier listened without uttering a word, except such as were calculated to draw the whole partic-

ulars forth from his companion with more precision and accuracy than the other might be inclined to display. A sort of cynical smile, too, curled his lip from time to time, as if there were a running commentary going on in his mind upon the tale of Master Forrest, which might not have very greatly gratified the other to hear; and then again, when he had done, he paused and pondered for a minute or two without reply, saying at length, "Of course, Master Forrest, you intend to marry the girl."

Forrest gazed with open eyes at so strange a proposal; but, seeing that Meakes looked serious, he replied in a tone half jest, half earnest: "Oh! certainly, Meakes, beyond all doubt: you know, if once I get her into my hands, I'll marry her, depend upon it."

Meakes's countenance assumed an air of well-pleased simplicity. "Ay, that's right now, Master Forrest, that's right," he said. "I thought you never would have proposed to me to help you to carry off the girl, without intending to marry her, for I think I should have thrown you out of the window if you had. But as you intend to marry her, why I don't mind if I lend you a hand. But I'll think over it till to-morrow morning, do you see, Master Forrest. I'm an old soldier, you know, and not likely to miss any stratagem, if you really do intend to marry the girl."

"Oh! that I will," replied Forrest, far more earnestly than he had before said it, "that I will, depend upon it, Meakes—upon—upon—"

He hesitated to pledge his honour; for so strange a thing is human nature that the man who, in the eye of truth and reason, scruples not to sacrifice his honour every day and in every relation of life, pays to the mere word the reverence due to the fact alone, and shrinks from pledging that which he virtually does not possess.

Meakes did not seem to observe his hesitation, but replied at once: "Well, well, that's all right, that's all right; and, since it is so, I'll help you with all my heart. Give me but till to-morrow morning, Master Forrest, and you shall have a scheme that can't fail; and now, what think you of just walking with me and white Midge there," pointing to the terrier, "up to the Sandhill lane? Do you remember last year, when you were down here shooting with me in the copse at the

back of the common, and my thinking I saw in the sand the mark of a beast's foot, somewhat uncommon-like; well, I never left him till I found him out, and there he is, housed just above the Sandhill lane, a fine old gray badger, with a black snout. I've seen him peering out three times, for all the world like an old weather-beaten lieutenant-general. Now Midge will draw a badger with any woman in the country—"

"I can't to-night, Meakes, I can't to-night," replied Forrest. "I don't choose that old man to say that he has beaten me out of the field. I will go back to his house and face him, and give him one or two raps on the knuckles; and then to-morrow morning I shall leave his house, and not join the party again till they go to Lady Mallory's. The surgeon speaks so favourably of my uncle this afternoon, that they will not be much longer detained, I trust, in a place where they are both unwelcome and unwilling guests."

Tim Meakes did not press his guest to the sport; and after having arranged to come back on the following morning, to hear what scheme the old soldier had devised, young Forrest took his leave, and left Meakes to pursue his designs against the badger if he liked.

The moment he was gone, however, Meakes stretched out the fingers of his brown broad hand upon the table, curled his lip into a bitter and sarcastic smile, and, after pausing for a minute or two in thought, he muttered to himself, "The rascal! the infernal cheating scoundrel! he thought to take me in, did he; but he shall find that he has made a great mistake! Poor little thing! I'll go down and see her, though that old dreaming idiot, her father, was fool enough to quarrel with me about poaching, as he calls it. It wasn't her fault, poor thing. I'll lay a scheme for him; yes, that I will: and hang me if he sha'n't marry her, or have every bone in his skin broken! He be ——;" and with a condemnatory imprecation upon the head of Forrest which we shall not repeat, Timothy Meakes, Esquire, made his commune with himself, took up his hat and walked down towards the village to visit Lucy Williams. Now, lest the interest which he took in the poor girl may excite some surprise, it may be necessary to point out the connexion between them. We have said that on his return to his native country Meakes obtained a share in the property of his father,

and we thereby implied that there was another person who shared it with him. That other person was his own sister, the wife of Williams the schoolmaster. She had died a year or two after, and her husband had brought upon himself a bitter and irreconcilable quarrel with her brother, by exhorting him in grandiloquent and very reprehensive terms on the subject of taking other people's game.

Good conduct may be the consequences of a good heart, of good principles early instilled, or of a good understanding. Now, though the good heart and the good principles had been certainly the portion of poor Williams, the good understanding was not; and although the little sins and errors of his brother-in-law shocked him terribly, and offended all his notions of right and wrong, yet he himself, in passing through life, committed, for the want of good judgment, an error of perhaps equal magnitude, and assuredly more dangerous consequences. Notwithstanding considerable opportunities and assistance, he spent all and even more than he possessed, left some debts, and his child, in fact, a beggar; while, as we have shown, Meakes, with some and considerable errors, went on and prospered. It is only at first sight that the moral will appear a bad one, inasmuch as duties neglected often imply a fault of a graver description than actual wrongs committed. "Hell is paved," said the preacher, "with good resolutions;" and destruction is as often incurred by what is left undone as by what is done.

CHAPTER VIII.

It is strange that human nature, with all its tendency to follow the multitude to do evil, is certainly not fond of the beaten track. Timidity may whip us on the path that others have travelled before us; but ambition and the spirit of enterprise are powerful, on the other hand, to lead us away from the track which others have explored, to carry us to new scenes, even if they be not so pleasant as the old ones.

It was in the afternoon, towards the hour of five or six, that Strafford mounted his horse to ride over upon his visit to Lady Mallory; and although there was a straightforward road, as good as the art of that day could make it, cut in nearly a direct line from Stalbrooke Castle to Mallory Hall, yet for some reason, or, perhaps, without any reason at all, but acting upon those vague impulses which govern at least one half of our being, he turned his horse's head through one of the paths in the park, in order to take a more circuitous, rougher, and less frequented road.

It was, however, on account of the latter quality that he chose it, whether that choice was the effect of reason or of impulse. The truth is, that the mind of young Strafford was at that moment burdened with many thoughts, which he wished to disentangle from each other, to ponder calmly, and to pursue to their conclusion uninterrupted. The conversation which he had had with Edith Forrest on that very morning had been to him a source of happiness and comfort far greater than he had even expected. His acquaintance with her in Germany had indeed not been very long, but it had been full of all those little incidents which produce from a short acquaintance a more intimate knowledge of character, lay up a greater store of associations, and open out between the hearts of persons previously strangers, more clear and direct channels of communication than long years of acquaintance under other circumstances. He had enjoyed opportunities of protecting, of guiding, of directing her, while surrounded by hostile armies, and exposed, not perhaps to dangers,

for there were really none of a probable kind, but to inconvenience, annoyance, and embarrassment. He had been the only friend during that period that she and her mother had; and they had been obliged to rely upon him for all things with that full confidence which is the strongest fosterer of regard.

He had thus known Edith well and deeply; and, if her beauty and her grace could fail to attract his attention and admiration, the treasures of her mind and of her heart, her gentleness, her sweetness, her fortitude, her kindness, had all been so plainly called forth on different occasions, that love was following willingly where admiration led, and all his words, and looks, and manner might well declare to Edith, beforehand, those feelings of affection and attachment which he waited but an opportunity to tell otherwise. From her manner to him he did not doubt that his society was not disagreeable to her; from what he knew of Edith, he felt very sure that she would behave to no man as she did to him, who might not entertain a reasonable hope of winning her affection. In this position they stood towards each other when her father had returned, and at that time, no comment, either from mother or daughter, had ever revealed to Strafford the real character and disposition of Mr. Forrest. From various vague indications, Strafford perceived that they feared him; but he knew not, and could not know, to what extent his domestic tyranny was carried.

When, then, he informed Strafford that Edith's hand and heart were engaged to another, the lover was surprised and pained; but he knew not at the time how deep, sincere, and permanent his love was. He felt glad that he had not committed himself in words; he felt disappointed at the conduct of her he loved; and he strove to account for that conduct in several ways, to find any excuse that he could from the circumstances in which Edith had been placed towards him: but he never thought of doubting that her father's representation was true.

He determined, however, to cure himself as speedily as possible of a passion which could not be gratified. He resolved to forget her, to seek relief in society, even, if possible, to find others as bright and engaging as herself, who might, by renewing the feelings which he fancied were only in their infancy with regard to her,

enable him to banish from his mind an acquaintance which had once been full of joy, but the memory of which must be proportionally painful. He had found the execution of these resolutions far more difficult than he imagined. He found that he could not forget Edith; he found that he could not love another; he found that he had loved her more than he imagined; he found that he might continue to love her longer than he wished or expected.

Nevertheless, Strafford was not a man to give way; he reasoned with himself, he schooled himself, he suffered no one to perceive that a great change had come upon him. He might not appear quite so well in health to the eyes of others, it is true; he might be somewhat graver; he might be a little impatient at times, though his natural temper was gentle and enduring. This was all, however, that was seen; and yet he thought of Edith frequently, constantly. He had been thinking of her on the very day preceding that on which he saw her again. He had been gazing for nearly an hour in the picture gallery on a small picture of Albano's, in which one of the female figures, showering flowers upon a group of children, always put him strongly in mind of the beauty and grace of Edith's form. He had gazed and pondered, though from that sight he gathered nothing but painful feelings, no other harvest than disappointed hopes. He was angry with himself for thus gazing and for thus feeling. He called it giving way to idle and fruitless regrets, and he wished for the time when the restoration to health of their fair neighbour, Lady Mallory, might afford him again the relief of her society, which was always, to him, pleasing and interesting.

We have shown how his conversation with Edith had changed all his feelings and sensations; we have shown how she left him happy in the knowledge that he was beloved, and confident in the promise that her hand should be his, although there might be some few difficulties and obstacles to be overcome. His life then, hitherto, had been pictured by the morning with the account of which we commenced our tale: bright and full of unusual happiness at its opening; covered with clouds and storms at an after period; clearing up again into brightness as it went on; and, at the moment to which we have led him, few vestiges were left of the

past tempest, with nothing but a cloud or two hanging here and there to threaten a passing shower.

Nevertheless, to the anxious eye of love, those clouds were sufficient to cause him much disquiet. What means might not be taken to cut off all communication between him and Edith, as soon as their attachment and engagement was known? At what means would Mr. Forrest hesitate, after having degraded himself so far as to falsify the truth in regard to her engagement with his nephew?

The report of the surgeon had, as we have seen, been favourable in regard to that gentleman's wounds, especially after having watched the patient for some hours. In the course of his illness and convalescence, indeed, the gentle care and kindness with which Edith was tending him might, perhaps, soften his feelings towards her; but still it was evident that his love for his nephew was far superior to that which he entertained for any other human being. It seemed a passion, a weakness; and Strafford saw in that affection an almost insuperable obstacle to his union with Edith, with the consent or approbation of her father. Their marriage, it is true, might take place without that approbation, for she was, or soon would be, of age to decide for herself, if she chose to exert the power. But he knew that it would be most painful for her so to do; and he also knew that his own uncle, for whose opinion he had so deep a veneration, though he might not oppose, would hardly approve of such a proceeding.

The motive, then, if not the reason, for his choosing a path less frequented than the ordinary one, was, that he might meditate over all these circumstances uninterrupted; and, proceeding with a far slower pace than that to which his quick spirit usually prompted, he revolved again and again every part of his situation, and sought, but sought vainly, to find some probable means of removing from his path even a part of the difficulties and dangers which lay in his way.

At length a sudden thought seemed to strike him, deserving of more attention than any which had previously presented itself. He checked his horse altogether, as if to reflect on it uninterruptedly; and at length, after a moment's pause, he again set forward at a quicker pace, saying to himself, "I will tell Lady Mallory, and ask her opinion and assistance; she has always been

kind and affectionate towards me, she has always been like an elder sister. She will help me I am sure, if she can; and, very probably, her near connexion with Mr. Forrest, as well as her wealth and influence, may give her some power over him, which may be employed to advantage."

The more he thought over it, the more he liked his own idea. He had known Lady Mallory for many years, even from the time when she first came down into that part of the country, the wife of a man considerably older than herself, but one to whom she had ever behaved with the utmost propriety, kindness, and attention; and her whole demeanour, though her character was somewhat veiled under a calm and stately, but not ungentle reserve, had appeared to Strafford such as to merit confidence and to encourage trust. As he went on he quickened his horse's pace; but we must precede him on his journey by a few minutes, and speak of the lady herself whom he went to seek.

Mallory Hall, or *The Hall*, as it was generally called, was a large, oldfashioned house of the late Tudor architecture, built of cold gray stone, and ornamented alone by small square windows in carved frames. In one of the rooms of this building, lofty, spacious, and somewhat gloomy, lined with dark oak, relieved by pictures in massive gilt frames, and hangings of crimson velvet and gold, surrounded by manifold objects of art and luxury, and dressed gracefully and richly, but somewhat negligently, sat a lady, if not in her first youth, still in the prime of life and beauty. She had been married at the early age of seventeen, and as yet counted considerably less than thirty summers; nor had those summers, as they came and went, acted upon her beauty any otherwise than as the golden tide of the ocean upon the bright sands, which, as it ebbs away, leaves them soft and glistening as ever.

Not one line of white mingled with her dark hair, not one beam of light was extinguished in the large, full dark eyes. The contour of her beautiful figure was as perfect, perhaps more perfect than ever, and the graceful bend of her head, which, perhaps, took a little from her full height, was habitual from her youth. The hand and arm, in which nature seems to take a delight in displaying all the loveliest lines, but which usually changes sooner than almost any other part of the human

form, were as rounded, as tapered, as delicately fine, as snowy white as ever; and the waist, which at one time might have been girdled with a span, though not now quite so fine as in her girlhood, seemed not less so to the eye, from the greater fulness which her whole figure had acquired. The features were straight and beautifully cut, but they were far from wanting expression; and that expression, except, perhaps, to a very nice and critical eye, was such as might well give unmingled pleasure to the beholder. There was a softness in it and yet a dignity, a gentleness and yet a spirit, an earnestness and yet a shyness, that are but seldom found united. There was a winning smile, too, when she was pleased, a look of soft melancholy when she was pained, that might well win upon all who beheld her; and it was seldom, very seldom, that a bright lightning flash in the eye, a sudden wrinkle in the contracted brow, and a quick curl of the proud lip, told that, though governed and repressed with matchless power, there were strong, eager feelings in that soft bosom, perhaps fiery passions at the bottom of the heart.

At present she was somewhat pale; and as she sat before a table with her eyes cast down, anybody might have discovered that those eyes were not upon the book, the pages of which lay open before her, but were fixed, unconscious of what they gazed upon, upon the spot of the rich Turkey carpet under her feet. Her meditations were deep and long; a sigh every now and then checkered without interrupting them; and whether it was that she regretted him who had left her a widow in her youth, or grieved from some other unexplained cause, it was evident that the lady of all that wide domain, the mistress of immense wealth and humble service, the talked of, the admired, the reverenced, the loved, was not so happy as Heaven might have made her.

It could not be called evening, for the sun was yet an hour or two above the horizon; but the heat and the brightness of the day were over, and the great light-bearer, as he sunk towards the western verge of heaven, poured a calm ray through the stone balcony and the window behind her; touched upon that graceful head as it leaned upon her hand; gilded the arm it rested upon: and perhaps, in all the wide worlds that at that moment were illuminated by his beams, the lands to which he was rising as well as those from which he declined, shone upon nothing more sweet, more lovely than herself.

As she thus sat she started suddenly, and listened to the sound of a horse's feet. There was a quivering of the lip; the eyelid and its dark curtain rose and fell rapidly, from the eagerness with which she listened; and, as she heard the sounds pass underneath the balcony, seem to circle around the house to the doors of the great hall, which lay on the other side, and there stop, a smile came upon her countenance, which brightened still more as the bell rang and announced a visiter.

She drew the book towards her, and looked as if she were reading. In a minute or two after a servant entered, and announced that Captain Strafford had come to say—"

"Show Captain Strafford hither," said the lady, interrupting him; but the servant replied that the porter had said she was still unwell; and then the eye flashed, evidently with vexation and disappointment. "Did I not say," she asked, "that I was better; that I would see Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, or Captain Strafford, or any old friend? Quick, run down and call him back. I wish to speak with some one from the Castle particularly."

The man obeyed at once, and the lady murmured to herself, "He cannot be gone yet; I have not heard his horse's feet. He must pass beneath the windows."

The colour mounted brightly into her cheek, either from shame or agitation, even though she was alone; but an impulse that she could not or would not resist carried her almost instantly into the balcony, at the very moment that Strafford was passing beneath it on his return. He was going slowly, but there was no moment for thought. His eyes were cast down, and she felt that she must either let him ride away or speak at once.

"So, Ralph," she said, in a tone that was low at first, but gained strength at the second or third word, "so, Ralph, you will not come in and see your old friend."

Strafford looked up, and a frank, well-pleased smile played upon his countenance. "Dear Lady Mallory!" he exclaimed, "how are you? They told me you were not well, and did not yet see any one."

"Oh! they were stupid," said Lady Mallory; "they do not know how to make distinctions between real friends and tiresome acquaintances. Either you or your good uncle I would willingly have seen days ago.

I do not coquet with you, Ralph, you know; and, having no designs upon your heart, care not whether you see me in dishabille, with a pale cheek and curlless hair, or not."

"Oh! then I shall take that as my warrant to ride round and come in," replied Strafford.

"Not unless you like it, truant knight," replied the lady; "I put no enchantment upon you. Come if you will: if not, go free."

Strafford nodded his head with a gay smile, turned his horse round, and rode back to the door of the Hall. There was a minute or two of silent expectation, it might be of agitation, too, on the part of Lady Mallory. Her eyes fixed eagerly upon the door, her hand played unconscious with the things upon the table, her breath came quick and short; but, after a moment, she recollected herself. She sat calmly down; she put away the book in which she had been reading; she drew an embroidery frame towards her; and, ere the door opened and Ralph Strafford entered, she had recovered fully her look of composure, and welcomed him, as she might do an old and dear friend, who had no other tie upon her than long acquaintance.

On his part, Strafford was perfectly free and unembarrassed. He took her hand with every appearance of sincere regard, saying, "Dear Lady Mallory, how glad I am to see you better. You look as if you had scarcely been ill: your people would indeed have deprived me of a great pleasure, by preventing me from seeing how much better you really are than I could have expected."

Lady Mallory's colour changed more than once as he spoke.

"You flatter, Ralph," she said. "I am better, certainly, but not quite well yet; but it certainly was very stupid of my people, for I was extremely angry yesterday that they sent you away; I could have seen you quite well. It is a very different thing seeing an old and dear friend and seeing a stranger. To-morrow, too, I must exert myself, you know; for I am to have the people here who have trespassed too long upon your uncle's hospitality already. I scarcely can say that I know any of them personally, though this worthy gentleman is, as you are aware, my first cousin."

"I knew it not till the other day," replied Strafford; "I never heard you mention him or his family."

"Oh, no, I never did," she answered. "He behaved, as I thought, very ill, some years ago, to me, about some property; all, indeed, that he possesses, which was at one time destined to be mine by our mutual uncle. I was a mere child at the time, and knew nothing of what took place; but my uncle, who was my guardian, and with whom I lived, had made a deed settling the property on me, when this Forrest stepped in, and, by various persuasions and misrepresentations, induced him to rescind the act, and to leave him, by will, the whole of his estates."

"That was unhandsome, indeed," said Strafford, "most unhandsome."

"But not so unhandsome," replied Lady Mallory, "as the means he took to obtain that end. I cared not about the property; I have never cared much for wealth; but it was all the manœuvres that were employed which disgusted me. The history, I fear, would only tire you; and yet—"

Ralph Strafford assured her that it would not do so; and she went on.

"I may have been misinformed, but I have been told that Forrest did everything that was base and low-minded to obtain his purpose; that he represented to my uncle that I was by no means in good health, and should most likely never see womanhood. My uncle's great weakness, I must tell you, was the desire of seeing his name perpetuated; and, in the deed he had made in my favour, he had expressly stipulated that I was to take his own name of Forrest, which I was to give with my hand to the man I married. His nephew, however, represented to him that, being under age, I could not bind myself to do so even if I lived, which he made him believe doubtful; and he induced him, by arguments built upon this foundation, to make a will leaving the property to him and his children, if he should have any, it being stipulated that they were always to bear the name of Forrest. As he was leading a somewhat dissolute life, however, at that period, which had first alienated him from my uncle's affection, a proviso was put in, that, if he were not married and the father of a child or children at the period of my uncle's death, the estates were to revert to me at once. He took care, how-

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ever, that such should not be the case, having married, but a month after the signature of the will, the unfortunate lady whom, I understand, he treats most cruelly. His daughter, however, is bound to retain the name of Forrest, let her marry whom she will; and perhaps that very fact may be an obstacle to her forming a connexion such as could be desired. I mention all this, Strafford," she said, "to explain my reasons for dropping all connexion with my cousin for so many years. I may have been misinformed, as I was a mere child at the time; but I think such was not the case, as the person who did inform me was poor Lord Mallory, who witnessed the whole transaction, and who was, as you know, Ralph, a father to me as much as a husband."

She coloured a good deal as she spoke, and pressed her hand upon her heart; and Strafford, not wishing to continue a topic that might be painful, was about to change the subject; but she suddenly interrupted him, and proceeded:

"I was pained and angry, you may conceive, when I heard all this; and as we were brought into some communications absolutely necessary upon my marriage with Lord Mallory, I spoke my feelings freely, and we parted in anger. One cannot, however, retain one's resentments for ever; and when he lately made some advances towards a reconciliation, I would not hold back. I am, therefore, only the more grieved that I was not quite well yesterday when they arrived at your uncle's, not wishing to show the slightest degree of unwillingness to receive them."

"I see, dear Lady Mallory," said Strafford, in reply, "that your servant has not given you the message I left. It is likely, I am afraid, to be some days, perhaps a week or two, before you do receive them." And he proceeded to detail all the particulars of the accident which had occurred to Mr. Forrest.

The conversation upon that subject was what might be expected; for, in regard to persons that are indifferent to us, we are reduced to speak mere commonplaces upon any event that befalls them; and, in general, we are inclined to talk about the occurrence rather than about the person, as our commonplaces then are more easily found, and bear the appearance of deeper interest. Lady Mallory talked of the horribleness of the accident; and upon that subject there was much to be said, giving a degree of feeling and point to the small

portion of compassion which she could afford to bestow upon Mr. Forrest himself.

As she made many inquiries, however, in regard to the circumstances attending the accident, Strafford was naturally led to mention the danger he himself had run. He did so merely casually, however, without dwelling upon it for a moment, but the whole demeanour of Lady Mallory was instantly changed. She was all eagerness and excitement; her beautiful dark eyes seemed to grow larger with the light of deep interest that beamed out from them. The lip quivered; she made him tell it all over again, and enter into every particular; and then she put her hand before her eyes, as if to shut out the horrible image presented.

"With such kind feelings," thought Strafford, "I may surely venture to tell her my situation with regard to Edith, and ask her advice and assistance."

Pray, reader, remember that Strafford had not been told all the particulars of Lady Mallory's demeanour when his horse's feet passed the window, and his hand rang for admittance that day, as *you* have been told! Pray remember that Lady Mallory had been his friend and acquaintance even from boyhood! Pray remember that, though neither a blind nor a dull man, he was not a vain man either.

He saw nothing in the conduct of Lady Mallory that, considering the intimacy of her family and his, was not perfectly natural and straightforward; and, not feeling—though he certainly thought her a very lovely and a very charming woman, and had a very deep and affectionate regard for her—not feeling the slightest inclination to fall in love with her, he never even dreamed that Lady Mallory ran the slightest risk of falling in love with him. He therefore determined to trust her with the secret of his feelings for Edith; but at the same time—though he resolved not to lose the opportunity now afforded him of speaking to his fair companion on the subject without the presence of any one else—yet he felt some degree of hesitation and embarrassment how he should introduce it gracefully. He tried to turn the conversation in that direction several times; but still he hesitated as he was about to begin, paused, looked embarrassed, and then went on a little farther, striving to mend the opportunity, and losing it by so doing.

Lady Mallory marked his embarrassment; and as there is nothing so catching as that mental malady, she became embarrassed also: she hesitated, she paused, she cast her eyes down upon the ground; and Strafford very soon found that if he did not conduct his proceedings better, the conversation would probably drop altogether. That conviction drove him to do the very thing he had been seeking to avoid, namely, to introduce the matter abruptly.

"You do not know, Lady Mallory," he said, "the surprise I received upon finding your cousins with my uncle."

"It was a curious circumstance," she said, looking up with some wonder at the suddenness of the transition; "it was a curious circumstance that they should be driven into your uncle's by the storm, when so near my own house."

"Oh! but that was not all," added Strafford; "the surprise was, that, on entering the picture gallery, and expecting to find three strangers, I found three acquaintances; one certainly a very slight one, I mean Mr. Forrest; but two very dear and very intimate ones, Mrs. Forrest and Edith."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lady Mallory, with all her feelings excited in a moment; "indeed! where could you nave known them before?"

"In Germany," replied Strafford. "When I was with the army there, I not only knew them well and intimately, but had an opportunity of rendering them some service and assistance."

The colour had come bright up into Lady Mallory's cheek; but she cast her eyes down, and remained in perfect silence. Strafford could not help remarking that there was something strange in her conduct. It seemed as if she were displeased, as if something had given her pain; and it is very likely that he might have dropped the matter then and changed his resolution, if Lady Mallory herself had not, after a long and somewhat embarrassing pause, demanded, in a tone as calm as she could assume, "And what sort of a girl is Edith Forrest? I have heard that she is pretty."

"I think she is very pretty," replied Strafford, eagerly. "Some people might not, because, though her figure is exquisitely beautiful, her face may have some defects. But the expression is so lovely and so varying,

and there is so much beauty in the countenance altogether, that he who could pause to look for defects must be a very cold critic indeed."

"Which you are not," muttered Lady Mallory, in a tone scarcely audible.

Strafford did not remark it, but went on.

"Do you know, dear Lady Mallory," he said, "on this very subject I have much wished to speak with you. You have always acted towards me as an elder sister; you have often given me good counsel, and told me how it was best for me to act. I know none that I can apply to so well as you; none who I think will advise me so well; none who can, perhaps, befriend and assist me in a case of some difficulty."

Lady Mallory remained silent, but he went on. "The circumstances," he said, "in which Edith and I were placed in Germany, the intimacy that existed between us, her dependance upon myself during her father's absence, all led to feelings, Lady Mallory, which you can easily divine."

Lady Mallory, for some minutes, had been as pale as death. The paleness, we can scarcely say, had increased as he went on, but her cheek had assumed an ashy hue, and her lips had lost their colour: but now the hand which she had held firmly pressed upon her heart dropped, as it were, lifeless by her side, and, with a sort of convulsive gasp, she fell back at once in the chair.

Strafford started up alarmed, exclaiming, "You are ill, Lady Mallory!" And, ringing the bell hastily, he summoned her maid, who instantly exclaimed,

"Oh, sir! my mistress has fainted. You had better leave me with her. She will be well soon. She fainted yesterday too, and I dare say she will be quite well again by to-morrow morning."

"I cannot go," replied Strafford, "without hearing that she is better, Mistress Margaret. But I will go and wait in the library till you come and bring me a report. Pray do not be long, for I am very anxious."

And, thus saying, he retired, somewhat surprised, somewhat embarrassed, not knowing well what to think; with a glimmering of the truth flashing upon his mind, but rejecting it with indignation against himself for entertaining such a suspicion even for a moment.

CHAPTER IX.

Cold water, essences, and all those means and appliances which the worthy housekeepers and Lady Bountifuls of a preceding epoch kept always ready for the restoration of those who, either as a voluntary or involuntary act, fell into fainting-fits, were now applied to Lady Mallory, who, however, remained so long in a state of insensibility as almost to puzzle the housekeeper and wear out the patience of the maid. At length, however, she revived; and, ere she had well recovered the use of her benumbed faculties, looked anxiously round the room.

"Where is he?" she said, in a low voice. "Where is Mr. Strafford?" Then, seeming to recollect herself, she added, "He will think this very strange and affected. He is not gone, I hope?"

"Oh! no, my lady, he is not gone," replied the lady's maid; "he is not gone; and I told him that you had just such another fit yesterday; so he won't think it affected, my lady."

"You did right, Margaret, you did right," replied her lady. "Do not let him go! pray do not let him go! I have something to say to him. I have a message to send. Go and tell him I am better, Margaret, and will see him in a few minutes. Bring me some of those drops you gave me yesterday, too."

She drew a deep sigh; and, in a moment or two after the other servant had gone, she sent the housekeeper away also, saying that she did not want her. The moment she was alone, Lady Mallory bent down her head upon her folded arms, which lay upon the table; and by the sort of convulsive sobs that shook her whole beautiful form, one might have judged that she was weeping.

Such, however, was not the case; no tear moistened her eyelids, and the pangs which she felt were evidently struggled against. It is woman's first impulse to conceal the feelings of her heart, and to that object were now chiefly directed all the efforts of Lady Mallory. She recovered herself speedily and wonderfully, and

in less than half an hour she sent to tell Strafford that she was ready again to receive him.

"You must have thought me very strange and very odd, Ralph," she said, when he came in; "but, to say the truth, I felt myself very ill for some time while you were speaking to me. I hardly heard, I believe, what you said, and certainly was unable to answer you. I thought it would pass away, and therefore said nothing about it; but at length it overpowered me; and you see that I, who used always uncharitably to say that women generally faint, or, rather, appear to faint, from affectation and to attract attention, fainted completely myself, though I can divine no cause for it. The day has been very warm, I believe, and sultry; and perhaps that may account for it. The same happened yesterday after the thunder-storm; and yet, as you well know, it was no cowardice made me faint."

"Oh no," replied Strafford, "I am sure of that, nor affectation either; but I fear that to-day you have been slightly accessory to your own illness; I mean by receiving me."

"Perhaps I may have been," replied the lady, looking at him gravely and earnestly; "perhaps I may. Nevertheless, I thought I was stronger than I feel I am. But you were going to consult me, Strafford! You said—at least I believe you did—that you were going to ask my advice; to make me your confidant, I think."

The effort by which she conquered her feelings so far as to speak such words, though terrible internally, was scarcely perceptible upon the surface; and Strafford blamed himself more than ever for having suffered one vain and self-conceited suspicion of her feelings towards him to cross his mind for a moment. He fancied that the strangeness of manner which he had remarked had proceeded from the approach of illness. He accused himself of having stayed with Lady Mallory already too long, and engaged her in conversation ere her health was fully restored; and, resolved not to commit the same error again, he replied, "No, no, Lady Mallory, I will not obtrude such things upon you at the present moment; some other time I will talk to you upon that subject; some other time I will ask your advice, when you are quite well again."

"Nay, Strafford," she said, "I am quite well again now; I am interested with the subject, and you must

not keep me in suspense really. You are in love with this young lady, I think you said, at least so I gathered," she added, "though I was so ill, to say the truth, that I scarcely heard what you said just before I fainted. But what can I do for you? Do you wish me to plead your cause with my fair cousin?"

"Oh! no," replied Strafford, his cheek slightly colouring at the supposition; "oh! no, dear Lady Mallory, I have pleaded my own cause already."

A deep sigh, that broke unconsciously from Lady Mallory's lips, interrupted him as he was speaking; and, remembering his good resolutions, again he rose, and taking her hand kindly, said, "I will not indeed go on to-night. I should be very selfish and unkind to do so—very ungrateful, I might say—after all the kindness that you have shown me at various times. I will come back another day; tell you the whole story out; consult with you, as if you were my sister, in regard to what I ought to do; and, as several days must elapse before the family can come over here, there is plenty of time."

"When will you come, when will you come, Strafford?" asked Lady Mallory, eagerly. "Will you come to-morrow?"

"I fear to fatigue you," replied Strafford. "You will not be well enough, Lady Mallory."

"Oh! yes I shall, indeed I shall," she replied. "I am much better to-day: I was much better yesterday and the day before, and I shall be better still to-morrow."

"Well, then, I will come," replied Strafford, "and will bring you news of your cousin's health: but remember, you are not to put yourself to inconvenience, or to hear me if it be too much for you."

"Oh! no, no. I shall be delighted to see you," the lady answered; and her looks spoke the truth of what she said.

With the thoughts of seeing him again, then, on the morrow, Lady Mallory let him bid her farewell and depart; and Strafford rode on quickly, for the shades of night were now beginning to fall. He had seen but little of Edith since the morning. At dinner-time, indeed, she had appeared, and a brief period of brighter enjoyment had been his while she had stayed. At all times, in this wintry life, the presence of those we love is like a gleam of sunshine through the clouds, lighting up one

particular spot amid the shadows, and giving warmth, and lustre, and loveliness to all beneath the ray. That passing gleam still seems brighter than the full sunshine; but with Edith, during the short time that she was present, there was a difference from her usual manner; a difference that rendered it, to the eyes of him who watched and loved, more deeply interesting, not the less bright. There was, indeed, an occasional shadow seemed to come across her when she thought of her father's situation, when she remembered that he was suffering pain and undergoing sickness: but, still, the impression of his harshness in return for all her tender care, contrasting with all the kindly courtesy she met with when away from him; the comparison of the cheerful ease, the free but not thoughtless current of conversation, which reigned without his chamber, with the fearful restraint that chained the mind within, made her spirit, like an uncaged bird, soar up and disport itself in its hour of liberty.

That hour had soon been over; and, after lingering a few minutes, she had returned to Mr. Forrest's room just as Strafford was about to mount his horse. He knew that she would remain there some time; but he was in great hopes that, as her father was pronounced so much better than any one had supposed he would be, she might quit his sick chamber, and spend part at least of the evening in the drawing-room.

Thus he rode on, as we have said, quickly; and this time he took the high road as the shortest and the easiest path to follow: but it very, very often happens, that those who follow the beaten track with careful and prudent calculation, in order to arrive the sooner at their object, meet with obstacles and obstructions which they would have avoided if they had taken a path seemingly more difficult. The greater part of Strafford's ride was accomplished, and he was within about two miles of Stalbrooke Castle, when he felt that his horse was going lame; and though, when he dismounted to examine the animal's feet, he could perceive no cause for such an occurrence, yet, on mounting again, he felt that the lameness not only continued, but increased.

The night had too far advanced for him to see without a light; but, as he was near the farmhouse of good Castle Ball, he led his horse thither, and tying him to the gate, walked through the little garden up to the

house. The door, as was very usual in many farm-houses in that day, stood open, even at that hour of the night. There were lights in the neat little parlour within, and the voice of the good farmer's mother, who kept his house and attended to the farmyard, was heard speaking in tones loud and shrill, and seemingly in no very placable mood of mind.

Frank and decided as usual, however, knowing and feeling that he was welcome in every house in the county, Strafford walked without ceremony up the passage, opened the door of the parlour, and entered. The farmer's neat teatable was set out, and he himself, resting his head upon his hand, sat sipping his tea, and patiently enduring a storm of many and sharp words, which were poured upon his head from the ready lips of the good dame his mother. Mrs. Ball herself was a hale, portly dame of some sixty years of age, with cap as white as snow, full of all sorts of neat proprieties, and sharp, close-cutting economies, set off by occasional liberalities and acts of kindness; prudent in all her notions; somewhat shrewish in her temper; proud of ginger wine, and large flocks of jetty turkeys. Seated at the teatable when Strafford entered, she had the small china cup beside her; while on her knee, still employing every moment, she held a neat black coat belonging to her son, on the cuffs of which she was diligently sewing a pair of snow-white weepers.

Before the visiter's entrance was perceived, the good lady poured forth a considerable part of the volley she was discharging to the following effect: "I did not say, my son Castle, that you should not go to the funeral. I did not say that you should not be as kind to the girl as possible. All I said was, that you, Castle Ball, an honest, staid, sober man, well to do in the world, are not, or should not be, at all events, a man to go and marry a wild, harum-scarum, tittuping thing like that. I'll never hear of it, I'll never consent to it."

"Hush, good dame, hush," cried Castle Ball; "don't you see the captain?"

And his honest brow and cheek grew very red at the thought of Strafford coming in and finding him undergoing such maternal objurgation. Mrs. Ball was a little ashamed too; but whereas a man under such circumstances generally holds his tongue, and remains silent between shyness and vexation, the gentler part

of the human race are inclined instantly to put themselves upon the defensive, and—as Mrs. Ball did on the present occasion—make their own cause good by any means in their power.

"Well, I'm very glad the captain has come in!" said Mrs. Ball, vehemently: "there's no man can tell you better, my son, what's right to do. Pray, sir, sit down: I was just saying to my son, captain, that it would be a scandal and a disgrace to the family he comes of—and a very good family of yeomen it is; won't you take a cup of tea, sir?—if he were to go for to think of marrying such a girl as that Lucy Williams!"

"Come, come, mother," cried Castle Ball, his eyes beginning to sparkle, "I won't have you say a word against poor Lucy."

"Well, my dear," said his mother, in a tone which evidently betokened some momentary apprehension lest her maternal authority should be resisted in the presence of Strafford, "I did not say that the girl was a bad girl; she's a very good girl, I dare say—nay, I know she is," the old lady added, in a more generous tone; "a very good girl indeed, and a very good daughter she was to her poor stupid father, too."

"Why shouldn't she make a good wife, then, if she has made a good daughter?" demanded Castle Ball.

"That's a different thing, quite a different thing," cried his mother. "Castle, I tell you she's no more fit to be your wife, than I am to be Sir Andrew's. Why, she's as fanciful and wild as a young kitten. She's got her head full of poetry and romances, and such sort of trash, only fit to make a woman good for nothing; and besides, she's not got a farthing in the world, not a single farthing. She's a beggar, she's worse than a beggar, for there are all her father's debts unpaid."

"That's not her fault, good mother," replied Castle Ball, "and I don't see why—"

What he said farther was lost in the angry tones of his mother, who could not be restrained even by the presence of Strafford, but who broke forth vehemently, exclaiming, "But I do see why you should not marry her, and why her being a beggar is a very good reason too."

A sort of ominous cloud gathering upon the stout farmer's brow, however, warned Mrs. Ball that she was going somewhat too far; and stopping suddenly, she said,

"Come, come, Castle, don't let us quarrel. All I want is for you not to go and do anything rashly. You can be as kind to the girl as ever you like, and I'll be kind to her too."

"I'm not going to do anything rashly, mother," cried Castle Ball, in a displeased tone; "and if you are kind to poor Lucy, that's all I want for the present. But here is Captain Strafford standing, and can't get a word in for your tongue, good dame."

"Oh, I'll be kind to her, I'll be kind to her," said the old lady, in a tone that promised anything but such kindness. "As for the captain, I'm sure I did not wish to interrupt him," and she turned towards Strafford with an air which seemed to imply that, now that her spirit was roused, she was quite as willing to turn a part of her indignation upon him as upon any one else, if he found fault with her.

He cut the matter short, however, with a good-humoured smile, saying to Castle Ball, "I have waited more patiently, farmer, than I fear my poor horse has done; for I left him tied to your gate, and came to seek a light, as I fear he has run a nail into his foot, and has gone quite lame for the last mile."

"There now!" exclaimed Castle Ball "and you have been kept here waiting all this time, sir! But mother's tongue, when it does begin—"

And after raising both his hands with a sort of Lord-have-mercy-upon-us air, which gave point to his observation on his good mother's powers of loquacity, he snatched one of the candles from the table, and ran out to see the horse, followed by Strafford.

It proved, as the young gentleman had supposed, that his horse had picked up a nail; and after having freed it from such a painful encumbrance, he threw the bridle over his arm, and led it quietly homeward, without venturing again within range of Mrs. Ball's fire.

On his arrival at the castle, Strafford found his hopes in regard to Edith fulfilled. Mr. Forrest, it seemed, had fallen asleep; Mrs. Forrest had remained by his bedside, sending Edith away from the sick chamber for a little relief; and John Forrest, after having sat about half an hour in the drawing-room, for the purpose of braving shame and the presence of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, had found himself somewhat embarrassed by the calm and courteous, though cold demeanour of the baronet, and

had retired to his own chamber upon the pretence of writing letters.

When Strafford entered, then, after putting his dress in some better array, he found Sir Andrew Stalbrooke sitting with his own quiet grace talking to Edith, who, seated at the end of the table, was engaged in the pleasant household task of making tea for her host. The simple beauty of her whole figure, the bright and characteristic expression of her countenance, the mingled look of powerful thought and youthful playfulness which sparkled over her features as she listened to some kindly and courteous jest of the Gentleman of the Old School, all woke up sweet and happy feelings in the heart of Strafford. There was something in seeing her there alone with the uncle he loved and respected so much; there was something in seeing her there performing the little household task in which she was engaged, which set imagination instantly at work to call up sunny dreams of the future; and love, and joy, and happiness, and domestic peace, grouped themselves in a picture for the eye of Ralph Strafford as the hand of no artist could ever yet display them. There was a bright, a glowing, and affectionate smile came upon the lip of both Sir Andrew and Edith when he entered; and, sitting down beside them, Strafford passed an hour or two of the most unmingled happiness that, perhaps, he had ever known in life.

And what did Edith feel? What did a heart that was formed for all gentleness and all affection feel during the course of that calm evening? Her feelings were various, but for the time they were almost all happy; for she banished every thought of difficulty and sorrow to come, and lived only in the happy present. In the first place, she felt—and, when she thought of it, the feeling seemed strange to her own consciousness—she felt herself perfectly at home in a house where she had not yet been six-and-thirty hours. She felt at home, far more at home than ever she felt at her father's house: her individual feelings towards Strafford we need not dwell upon; they were deep, strong, and powerful; for she loved, and loved with all the intensity of a heart possessed of that grandest of capabilities, the power of loving truly. But as she sat there with none but him and his uncle present, with their affection for each other shining forth every moment, and with a

courteousness of word, and thought, and look, and feeling, appearing in everything—towards her, among themselves, to the very servants that came and went on different occasions—the contrast which the whole presented to the scene she was accustomed to behold in her father's dwelling was so strange, so bright, so beautiful, so consonant to all the mild and graceful thoughts of her own heart, that she could almost have wept with tenderness and joy at the sight of that state of existence which she might, perhaps, often have dreamed of, but never before had seen. She could almost have wept, especially when she thought that the time might come when, linked to the dearest of these two amiable beings by the sweetest of ties, she might become an inmate of their happy home, a permanent sharer in the calm happiness of their course of life.

A tear did glisten in her eye, though she repressed it; but, happy as she was, she became somewhat more silent after Strafford entered, for she loved to hear him and his uncle, she loved to watch their mutual demeanour towards each other. In Strafford towards Sir Andrew there was respect approaching to veneration, but brightened and rendered free and graceful by deep love. There was scarcely a thought of his bosom that he hesitated to speak openly and straightforwardly before his kind friend and second father. There was not an enthusiasm, there was not an opinion that he feared to pour forth, knowing well that, if Sir Andrew had lost a part of those enthusiasms by long acquaintance with the world, they were yet dear to his heart and bright to his memory; and that, if his uncle differed from the opinions that he stated, that difference would be expressed with kindness, with gentleness, we might say with humility.

On his part, Sir Andrew Stalbrooke had never a harsh word but for vice: error he lamented, failings he could pass over or notice in private: though ever firm in right, he was still lenient in expression; he sought to lead rather than to drive, to convince rather than to command. The general tone of his conversation was the complete picture of his mind. There was, as we have said, a sunshinyness pervading it all; there was a bright cheerfulness, in short, about it, which, strange as it may seem, was nevertheless quite consistent with a slight, a very slight degree of occasional melancholy. That

melancholy, however, was only sufficient to make every one feel, when they were conversing with him, that the stream was deep as well as sparkling; and that through the whole of all he did and said, ran the current of deep thought and feeling: that the charm was the charm of the spirit, the courtesy the courtesy of the heart.

To all who approached him, Ralph Strafford was well aware that his uncle was kind and gentle as the sweet westerly wind; but, knowing him so well as he did, he saw at once, and saw with delight, that towards Edith there was an affectionate tenderness mingling with his whole manner. Whether it sprang from compassion at the painful situation in which she was placed, or from esteem for high qualities discovered or fancied in her mind and heart, that tenderness, to the mind of Strafford, argued brightly for the view which his uncle would take of their mutual affection. They were pleasant, they were joyful hours; and when, in the end, the door again opened and John Forrest entered, there were two at least of the party who drew a deep sigh.

CHAPTER X.

From the cottage to the palace, from the castle to the hovel, through all the imperceptible shades and grades of life and station that intervene between greatness and littleness; from the sage to the idiot, from the conqueror to the worm, fate, in darkness and in silence, with movements that men seldom see and never appreciate, is spinning that small, fine, but binding thread which weaves their common destiny into one inextricable web. It is not alone that the mouse disentangles the lion from the toils; it is not alone that the stronger saves or destroys the weaker; but it is that every being at every step affects the destinies of millions of others, present and to come, and carries on the train of cause and event that is going on from eternity to eternity.

The dependance of the great upon the small, and the continual reference of our fate to petty circumstances, is a consideration full of weighty moral, and is never to be forgotten.

It is, then, with the principal personages of our story, and in reference to them, that we have to do when we return to the humble cottage of Lucy Williams on the morning after that day which we closed in the last chapter.

In the first place, however, we must say that, on the preceding evening, her uncle, whose character we have dwelt upon somewhat at large, had visited the dwelling, which he had not entered for many years before, and had appeared in her eyes quite a different being from that which she had been taught to believe him. He had sat down beside her, and striven in a frank, soldier-like tone to give her comfort; he had bid her cheer up; and with a delicacy of feeling which is occasionally to be met with in every class of life, he had avoided the slightest reference to his quarrel with her father, but assured her that she should never want a home and a kind look while he had one to give her.

The effect was very sweet upon the mind of Lucy. Her father had not, indeed, taught her to look upon her uncle with any degree of harshness. Williams had been a somewhat weak and fanciful, though a talented man; but still there were such things as firm principles in his mind, from which he never departed; and he would as soon have thought of neglecting to teach Lucy anything that he could teach her, as he would have thought of perpetuating his own enmities by prejudicing her mind against any adversary. She knew, indeed, that Meakes and her father were not friends; and though her father had never dwelt upon his brother-in-law's character, she pictured the old soldier and reputed poacher as a harsh, unfeeling, brutal being, without natural affections or kindliness of heart. She trembled, even, when he entered the cottage upon the day we speak of; but his manner was so different from that which she had anticipated, his greeting so ardent, and his meeting with her so totally opposed to all that might naturally have been expected from a man of his pursuits and habits of life—he was, in short, so really kind, so truly tender, so scrupulously delicate and forbearing, even in the midst of a certain bluffness of manner and plainness of language—that Lucy's apprehension and reserve were soon cast off, and she clung to him as the last tie between herself and the kindred she had loved. The presence, the assistance, and the approbation of

Sir Andrew Stalbrooke had been to her a great comfort indeed; but there is a vast difference between protection and sympathy, which, to have its full effect, must, of course, be reciprocal; and although Sir Andrew might sympathize greatly with the poor girl's grief, yet the vast difference of station prevented her from feeling that it was sympathy as well as compassion.

With her mother's brother, however, it was a different thing. She felt that it was affection prompted him, and she shed tears of joy to find the natural ties between them recognised so willingly.

She was surprised, however, before Meakes left her, to hear him talk of the events which had occurred that very day between herself and young Forrest; but she soon found that his information was not accurate, and she hastened to set him right, at least as far as the supposition went that she entertained the slightest regard for him.

Meakes made her relate the whole, commenting, as she narrated the young lawyer's proceedings for the last two years, with such words as "The atrocious scoundrel; the dirty villain!" But when he heard that Forrest had induced her to write him down a promise to pay the last sums that he had lent to her father, the baseness of his purposes became but the more apparent. The old soldier, however, laid out a scheme in his own mind for making the very arts that the seducer had employed, and the cruelty that he probably intended to perpetrate, the means of bringing about his punishment. As he thought over the whole, his lip curled with a well-pleased smile; and though the sum owed was somewhat larger than he would have felt at all inclined to give to Williams had he been alive, yet he would now have given at least five times the amount for the pleasure of punishing him who had attempted to wrong the dead man's child.

Lucy saw him smile, and did not very well divine the cause thereof, but it was soon in some degree explained to her.

"Ah, my girl!" said Meakes, "it won't end there. You never saw a fox come out of its earth, Lucy, without he wanted some dinner; you never saw a lawyer lend money to anybody without intending to get more than he gave; but don't you be afraid, my girl, you shall have the money to pay him: leave that all to me,

Lucy, leave that all to me: I've got a plan in my head, and he shall be paid with interest. I'll tell you what, Lucy, if he comes here again—"

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Lucy; but then recollecting herself, she added, "Oh, he will not come back here after what happened between him and Sir Andrew."

"Perhaps not, perhaps not," replied Meakes; "but I'll tell you what, my dear, if he doesn't come he'll send; and if he sends, you tell him that you have not got it to give him, and don't intend to give it at all."

"Oh yes, but I do," replied Lucy; "for Sir Andrew Stalbrooke sent me down fifteen guineas by Philippina this morning, and she says she's sure, if I tell him all about it, he will give me the rest."

"Never mind, Lucy, do as I tell you," replied her uncle. "I tell you I'll pay the money for you; and who should pay it if Tim Meakes don't? Isn't he your own uncle, and sergeant in the king's regiment of Pompadours? Only let me take my time with the fellow, that's all. I'll have my eye on his earth, and I'll draw him as sure as my dog Midge will draw a badger. Trust me for sticking to him, Lucy, dear. They shall cut all my four paws off before I let go my hold."

It was so long since Lucy Williams had been in the custom of hearing the peculiar conversation of her worthy uncle, that the habit which he had of forgetting from time to time that he was a human being, in the elucidations which he derived from the brute creation, with which he was more familiar, and of talking of himself as if he were the particular beast uppermost in his mind at the moment, utterly puzzled and confounded her; and Meakes, seeing that such was the case in the present instance, contented himself with adding, "Never mind, Lucy, never mind: only be a good girl and do what you are bid; and if they should come to arrest you for the money, let them do just as they please, and remember that I'm looking after them like a hawk; that I've got my wings spread out, and am just hovering, and will pounce upon them in a minute; and as soon as I've done what I want to do, you shall come up and live with me, and be my little housekeeper till some gay young fellow comes and runs away with you. I dare say you've got some one at the bottom of your

little heart now—eh, Lucy?—lying snug where nobody can see him, like an otter in a hole."

Lucy blushed not a little, which confirmed her uncle in the belief that something of the kind might be the case. Meakes smiled as he saw it, saying, "I hope you don't flutter your feathers so, silly bird, when he's by, or shoot me if the dog won't run in upon the game." And then, with a good-humoured word or two more, her uncle left her and took his way homeward.

But it was, as we have said, to the morning which followed after this evening visit that we must turn, after noticing one more event that occurred on the preceding evening. The good German, Philippina, had remained with Lucy, showing her every kindness that Sir Andrew Stalbrooke himself could have desired, till a few minutes before the arrival of Meakes at the cottage. At that time, however, she had received a message from the castle, purporting that if Miss Lucy, as Lucy Williams was generally called in the neighbourhood, was better and able to spare her, the housekeeper at Stalbrooke would be very glad if Mistress Philippina could come and sit up with the sick gentleman, as she knew so much better how to manage sick people than anybody in the castle. Such in truth was the case: no one was more skilful or more attentive on any such occasion than the good German. She was firm and yet kind, active but not bustling, taciturn and yet cheerful; and whenever there was any illness in the house of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, it was customary to call upon Philippina for assistance in the sick-room.

On applying to Lucy to know whether she would spare her, Philippina was assured that she might go with perfect tranquillity, as the poor girl was by this time quite recovered; and the servant girl was ordered positively to refuse admittance to her persecutor if he presented himself at the cottage again. Philippina accordingly went; and she had not yet returned on the following morning, when the preparations began for the funeral procession of the poor schoolmaster.

Lucy had determined, as was customary, to follow the body of her father to the grave, and thought that she had well prepared her mind to do so; but when the first of the dead man's friends and acquaintances began to gather at the cottage, they found that, weakened and shaken by the events of the preceding night, Lucy was

so terribly agitated, even with the sad preliminaries of the funeral, that there was scarcely a chance of her being able to reach the churchyard. She still, however, insisted upon going, notwithstanding all that her uncle could say to prevent her; and the old soldier, as well as several others who seemed to take an interest in the poor girl's situation, were puzzled how to act, when a little incident, thrilling to her heart by many a dear association, overthrew all the stock of resolution which she had been mustering, and once more quite overcame her. This was the arrival of the good young farmer Castle Ball, who, dressed in his suit of shining black —as fine a specimen of an English yeoman as it is possible to see—entered the cottage where he had spent many a happy hour with Lucy and her father, and with a look half shy, half agitated, advanced towards the spot where she sat endeavouring to gain sufficient composure for her task.

The very sight of him seemed to agitate her; but, nevertheless, even at that sad moment, a ray of pleasure lighted up her countenance for a moment as she saw him; and Castle Ball, with the memory of many sweet hours, the feeling of deep true love and kindly compassion all strong at his heart, could not resist the emotion of the moment, but took her in his arms before them all, and kissed her cheek, calling her his dear Lucy.

There was a little murmur of pleasure ran round the cottage parlour; but, strange to say, the effect was to make Castle Ball put his handkerchief to his eyes, and Lucy to burst into a passion of tears.

"Indeed, my dear Lucy, you must not go," said Meakes; but Lucy waved her hand, and certainly would have made the attempt, had not the party been increased by the unexpected arrival of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke himself and Ralph Strafford, who had come to pay the last tribute to the ashes of poor Williams.

Sir Andrew walked straight up to Lucy, and took her kindly by the hand, saying, as he saw the agitation in which she was, "My dear child, you must not think of going. Your heart pays the tribute to him that is gone sufficiently, Lucy. The rest is a ceremony, my poor child: go and lie down upon your bed, Lucy. Here, my good girl," he continued to the servant girl, "go with your mistress up stairs to her room: you can read

to her. You can read the Bible, I know;" and, leading the poor girl to the foot of the stairs, he left her, and returned to see the last sad offices properly performed.

Upon the funeral we shall not dwell; but it had scarcely left the cottage ten minutes, when the sorrows of poor Lucy Williams were broken in upon in a manner that she but little expected. Somebody was heard walking about in the rooms below; but this, as the house had that morning been full of painful and unusual sounds, did not strike her as anything particular, till she heard a quick but heavy and creaking step ascending the little narrow staircase to the room in which she lay. Some one then tapped at her door sharply, but not hard; and on the girl running out to see who it was, the portly person of good Dame Ball, somewhat out of breath with climbing up the stairs, entered the room, and occupied the chair by Lucy's bedside.

She had come, as she had promised her son, to be kind to Lucy Williams; and there can be no doubt that her intention was really to be kind, as far as her knowledge and capabilities went. Lucy, who had been all her life afraid of her, saw her approach with terror and vexation; but perhaps the emotions produced by the visit of Mrs. Ball might in some sort be beneficial, by giving a totally different direction to the thoughts and feelings of the poor girl, whose first sensation on seeing that good lady was generally that of fear, verging quickly into indignation and resistance.

At first Mrs. Ball began by endeavouring to console poor Lucy for the death of her father; but she very speedily and very naturally deviated into the matter of her son's affection for the orphan girl, and she then showed how little her ideas of treating a person kindly coincided with the ideas generally entertained upon such a subject. She first set to work with some degree of moderation, having in view to impress Lucy clearly and fully with the absolute impossibility of her ever being united to Castle Ball. The thing, she said, was quite ridiculous; not to be thought of; altogether out of the question; and she proceeded, most satisfactorily to her own mind, that she was in no respect a fitting or proper match for a rich, a respectable farmer.

Lucy wept for some time and said nothing; but Mrs. Ball was not at all well pleased with this sort of taciturnity. Her eagerness increased as she went on, her views

and purposes expanded as she thought she had made progress; and it is not quite clear that, feeling herself harsh, unkind, and unjust, she did not on that very account become still more so, venting upon Lucy the irritation which she felt, because her own conscience smote herself. As she went on, we have said, her views extended, and she felt very much inclined not to leave the house till she had obtained from the poor girl a positive promise on no account or consideration whatsoever to wed her son Castle Ball.

"I'm sure," she said, tossing her head and shrugging her shoulders, "I'm sure, when I was a young woman, I should not have thought of staying in a part of the country where there was a young man that wished to marry me and his parents would not consent. I would have gone to some friend at a distance; but there was no need for me, for I brought my husband wellnigh seven hundred pounds, so his father and mother were glad enough to get me. If they had not been, I'm sure I should have tossed up my head and scorned to stay in their neighbourhood, that I would!"

"Perhaps I might too," replied Lucy, "if I had any one at a distance to go to, for I'm sure this place will be sad enough to me."

"Oh, that's all very pretty," replied Mrs. Ball; "where there's a will there's always a way."

"Do you know, Mrs. Ball," said Lucy, rising from her bed with an air that surprised the good dame for a moment, "do you know that I think this very cruel of you, to come here with such language at a time like this, when God knows I am thinking more of the dead than of the living? I wish you would go away and leave me."

"Marry, come up," cried Mrs. Ball, glad of an opportunity of bursting forth into anger, to get rid of the self-reproach that she felt at the justice of Lucy's charge; "Marry, come up, I suppose miss will turn me out of the house. I always knew you were a saucy thing, and I now see what it would be if I let my son have his fool's way and marry you. I should not dare to say my life was my own. I should be obliged to wash the dishes for the fine lady, and make her a low courtesy every time she spoke to me. I should have a mistress over me in my dead husband's house;" and Mrs. Ball began to cry But before she had shed five tears she

thought better of it, and, marching straight up to Lucy, she exclaimed, "I'll tell you what, ma'am, though! saucy as you are, I sha'n't quit the house till you promise me either to go away from this part of the country fully thirty miles, or else not to marry my son Castle Ball if he asks you twenty times."

The colour rose bright, both with shame and indignation, into Lucy Williams's clear brown forehead, and she replied at once, "I shall make you no promise of any kind, Mrs. Ball; you have no right to ask any promises from me, and I shall make you none. You are very unkind, very cruel, and very unjust. I wish you would leave me! But if you will not, and will drive a poor orphan girl like myself out of her dead father's house, while his body is being carried to the grave, I will go and take refuge at some neighbour's till you choose to go."

"No, no," exclaimed the virago, "no, no, you sha'n't do that; you have told me to go out of the house, and I'll go. I see how it is, pretty mistress; but you'll miss your mark, depend upon it;" and down the stairs walked Mrs. Ball, muttering all the way that she went, "Silly, fantastical thing! I wonder the boy is such a fool! pretty, I dare say! with her staring black eyes as big as a teacup, and her hair like nobody else's in the world! a May-day molly, forsooth!"

As soon as she was gone and the outer door was heard to bang after her, the strength that had supported Lucy Williams seemed to give way, and, casting herself down by the side of her bed, she buried her face in her hands and wept violently, murmuring, "I wish I had never been born!"

She remained there till she was roused by the voice of Philippina speaking to the servant girl who had followed Mrs. Ball down stairs.

"Where is she? where is she?" said the voice of the good German, in somewhat agitated tones. "I will see her directly. I want to see her directly."

"She is in her room, ma'am," replied the girl. "Mrs. Ball has been here, and been very unkind to poor Miss Lucy."

"She is a very wild woman," replied Philippina, "a very wild woman indeed. I met her just now, and she finds that I can be as wild as she is. But I have something to speak to poor Lucy about;" and she walked

slowly and thoughtfully up stairs to the room of poor Lucy Williams, who rose up to meet her, with her whole heart torn by conflicting emotions, each painful, though in a very different character and degree

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CHAPTER XI.

When Ralph Strafford left Lady Mallory with the promise of calling on her on the succeeding day, that lady seemed to be perfectly recovered from the temporary attack under which she had laboured, and no eye could have discovered, by her manner or demeanour, that there was any great agitation within. Even after he was gone, she had sufficient command over herself to ring and say that she was not to be disturbed for the next hour, without any emotion betraying to her servants that the conversation between her and Strafford had been such as to affect her painfully.

When she was secure, however, and alone, Lady Mallory became an altered being. She bent down upon the sofa, she hid her eyes upon the pillows, her hands grasped the soft cushions convulsively; and though her face was invisible and her lips were silent, yet the heaving and writhing of her whole beautiful form told a tale of deep mental agony which was not to be mistaken. She sobbed not, she wept not; it seemed for some time as if her feelings were so scorching and intense as to dry up the fountain of her tears. At length, however, tears came; at first fiery, passionate, and terrible; but then calmer and sadder, and she sat up, gazing towards heaven, with her hands clasped, and the bright drops rolling over her cheek.

"He loves me not!" she murmured; "he loves another! God of heaven!" she added, after she had repeated these words two or three times, "is it possible that I, who have loved him so deeply and so well; that I, who have shaped my conduct towards him as perhaps woman never did; I, who loved him when perhaps I ought not to have done so, and yet hid that love deep in the secret places of my heart till I was free to give it way, hiding it from him and from all others, even

from myself; I, whose love he must have seen and known, since my hand was free, by the altered manner, by the warmer tone, by the brighter eye, by the joy that his presence gave me, by the pain to see him depart; is it possible that I should be forgotten, neglected, slighted for a mere girl, a child in whose company he has not been a dozen times? It is not true; it cannot be true: it is but some idle caprice of the moment."

She paused, and thought darkly, bitterly, gloomily; and then added, "She loves him too: so at least he implied. At that I wonder not. And yet, what is the love of a child like that? She cannot love as I can love; she can hardly know what love is."

Again came another gloomy pause, and feelings of deep sorrow seemed to rise within her. "And is it indeed so?" she said. "Am I never to know the bright dreams that sun over the cold fate of woman? Are the prospects of my youth to be thwarted by a villain? And he to succeed in carrying off the inheritance that was promised to me? Then bound by gratitude, and ignorant of what love is, am I to give up the fairest years of youth to him who protected and defended me when left a portionless orphan, and to devote the hours that God and nature give for life's first joys to the cold tendance of an old man's winter? And then, when love has touched my heart with its magic fire, and I have hid, with stony firmness, the light that scorched me, am I to find, at the very time when the ties that bound me are broken, and I am free to love and be happy—am I to find that here too the blight and mildew of my fate withers the flower in the blossom; that he is cold and chilly towards her whose heart is all fire and emotion, giving his heart's bright treasure to an idle girl that cannot, cannot love him as I can love?"

"It must not, it must not be," she added, starting up, and clasping her hands eagerly together. "It cannot, it shall not be, for I will prevent it; I will stake life and soul upon it; I will shake off this weak womanliness that crushes all my energies; I will take love's fire to light me on my way, and will find a means, if there be a means on earth, to thwart this fine device of theirs. He shall be mine," she continued, thoughtfully; "he shall be mine, cost what it will; or, if he be not, he shall never be hers. There must exist obstacles; his words showed it clearly; and give me but an obstacle

between them no bigger than a molehill, I will find means to swell it to a mountain. Ralph Strafford, Ralph Strafford, thou shalt not cast away a heart that loves thee as mine does!" and again she fell into deep thought, pondering the means now that she had formed the resolution. As she did ponder those means, a thousand circumstances rose to her recollection which brightened the thought of success.

"Strafford loved me," she thought. "I am sure he loved me before he went to this last campaign. I have marked that his manner was changed, that he has been more melancholy, more gloomy since his return. But he is fond of me, he trusts me still; and I will find means to retrieve that love. He trusts me; he seeks for my advice and assistance even in his love for another; and he shall have my advice and assistance, but it shall not work as he expects it. This Forrest, too, though doubtless he would be glad enough to snatch at such a match as this for his girl Edith, must yield to my will in that at least. Is he not in my power? Could I not blast his reputation? nay, perhaps affect his life, did I so will it? I will show him how much he is in my power. I will let him know that none of his dark secrets are hidden from me; and then, if he dare snatch at Strafford for his daughter, he shall rue the day, and I will bring such disgrace upon the name of Forrest as will render the taint worse than the blood of an Egyptian! The very thought makes me feel well again. I will cast off this foolish sickness; I wonder I was weak enough to faint!"

In such thoughts and with such resolutions, Lady Mallory passed the rest of the evening. Nor, as far as it was possible, did she fail to execute, even that evening itself, the determination of conquering her own womanly weakness, and bending every energy to the accomplishment of her purpose. She rang for tea; she gave her orders calmly and distinctly; she moved with grace and strength; all trace of corporeal weakness was at an end; the tears had been washed carefully from her eyes, and twice she took up an instrument of music, on which she was no unskilful performer, and played and sang when any of the domestics were in the room. Had they been very observant, indeed, they might have remarked that a change had come over their mistress, and that her demeanour was somewhat

different from what it had been for months before. They might have found it somewhat difficult, indeed, to point out in what the change consisted; but Lady Mallory's own maid described it in a single sentence. She said that her mistress was more like what she used to be during old Lord Mallory's life than she had seen her since his death.

Such indeed was the case: she was once more acting under a high restraint: she was once more mastering herself and all her feelings, though not with the same fine purpose as before. Her air and her tone were grave as well as calm; her eye rested upon everybody and everything to which she turned it with firm steadfastness She fell into no fits of revery when any one was present. But her whole aspect was thoughtful; and though her mind was present and active in everything she did or said, yet it seemed as if her words, and actions, and looks, had all a reference to some ulterior object. When she was alone, indeed, she thought, and thought deeply; and taking forth one of the drawers of her cabinet, she strewed the table with papers which she read attentively, and from which she made more than one long extract ere she replaced them and locked them up.

The last act before she retired to rest was to order her carriage to be prepared by nine on the following morning; and though her maid ventured to remonstrate on the risk of going out so early after such an illness, Lady Mallory silenced her by a word, and was ready at the appointed hour. The coachman received orders to drive to Stalbrooke Castle, and thitherward he took his way, with all the pomp and circumstance of four magnificent horses, two outriders, and other attendants. On arriving at the castle, for the journey, in those days, occupied some time, Lady Mallory found that Sir Andrew Stalbrooke and Captain Strafford were both absent, having gone to attend the funeral of the poor schoolmaster Williams.

The next inquiry was for Mrs. Forrest and Edith; and finding that they were in the room of Mr. Forrest, she sent in to announce her coming, and to seek an interview with them. To both she was completely a stranger, and with Mrs. Forrest her meeting was somewhat cold and restrained. It was perfectly courteous, however; and she took care to assure that lady how

much pleasure she received from a reconciliation with her good cousin Forrest: she attributed, in general terms, the misunderstanding which had existed so long between them to mistake and misrepresentation, and expressed a trust that, for the future, they might see far more of each other.

Towards Edith her manner was much warmer; and the difference was produced by a vain struggle between new feelings and previous determinations. She spoke to her more as a friend and a sister; declared how delighted she should be if, instead of remaining there, making her cheek pale by watching and anxiety, she would come over with her to the Hall, and give back to her dull mansion the gayety and cheerfulness which it had long lost. There was something tender and even affectionate in her manner towards the fair girl; and, strange to say, notwithstanding all the purposes which Lady Mallory at that moment entertained, that tenderness and that affection were not altogether hypocritical. She felt a degree of pity for Edith; she felt a degree of sympathy for her. Even while determined to disappoint her love and frustrate her hopes, she grieved for her. She wished that they had not been so fated; and the sweet gentleness of her young cousin, the bright candour that shone out in all she did and said, were so different from what Lady Mallory had expected, were so unlike the light, idle girl that rivalry had painted, that she felt pain, but, alas! not hesitation. After a few minutes given to conversation with Mrs. Forrest and her daughter, Lady Mallory asked if she might not be admitted for a few minutes to the sick-room of her poor cousin.

"I am an excellent sick-nurse," she said with a sigh, "having had to watch for many a long and anxious night by a bed of illness, which was but to prove the bed of death. I shall not disturb him, therefore," she added; "and as I have one or two things to tell him, which may give him much pleasure to hear, my visit may have as much effect as the doses of a surgeon."

"My father is much better this morning," replied Edith. "He had a somewhat disturbed and rambling night, fancied he saw strange people, and talked somewhat incoherently: but about four o'clock this morning he fell into a very sound, sweet sleep, and awoke this morning considerably better. I will ask permission first,

if you please," she continued, and she left the room for that purpose.

Lady Mallory did not lose the opportunity, though the fear of losing it forced her to be abrupt. "Have you been long acquainted with Sir Andrew Stalbrooke's family, my dear lady?" she asked, as soon as Miss Forrest was out of the room.

"Not yet more than three days," replied Mrs. Forrest.

Lady Mallory looked surprised. "Oh then," she exclaimed, "the report which has reached me must be mere idle nonsense, that Mr. Forrest and Sir Andrew have arranged a marriage between your daughter and Captain Strafford."

"An idle rumour, indeed, I fear," replied Mrs. Forrest; "I lament most bitterly, madam, to say, that Mr. Forrest has other views for poor Edith; and I feel sure that nothing upon earth will change my husband's purposes in those respects, even should it cost his child health, happiness, or life itself. No, no, it will never be with his consent, at least, that Edith marries such a man as Captain Strafford."

Lady Mallory looked still more surprised; but, before she could reply, Edith had returned, saying, that her father would have great pleasure in receiving his cousin; and the lady at once proceeded to Mr. Forrest's sick-room.

The windows were partly closed, so that but little light entered the chamber, and the curtains on the side of the bed next to the casement were closely drawn also, so that the sick man's bed was kept wellnigh in darkness. Nevertheless, Lady Mallory could see enough of the countenance which lay upon the uneasy pillow before her to mark the terrible change which had taken place in those features since last she had beheld them. At that time, though not exactly a young man, Mr. Forrest had been full of health and vigour. His cheek had been florid, his eye bright, his hair, though somewhat mingled, still dark and glossy. He was now pale, haggard, worn: and had that expression on his countenance most painful to behold, the oldness of the heart.

The sight was in some degree painful to Lady Mallory, especially as the news which she had learned from Mrs. Forrest had taught her not to entertain towards the sick man exactly the same feelings with which she

had come to Stalbrooke Castle. She had thought of him, as she drove thither, only as one whom she was to meet as an antagonist; whom she was to coerce and compel to her will by the power which she had over him. Now, on the contrary, she found that they were likely to act together with the same views and towards the same ends; and she greeted him with a smile of satisfaction, which, to say the truth, somewhat surprised Mr. Forrest.

"How are you, my good cousin?" she said, sitting down by his bedside; "this is really a terrible accident that has happened to you."

"Oh, I am better," he said, "much better, and I trust that I shall soon be well. I had a little fever last night, and fancied that I saw people that I have not seen for many years. I raved, I believe; but that all has passed away; the fever has left me; and, what is better, I have had some refreshing sleep, and feel stronger, though bruised and torn. It is very kind of you, indeed, Isabella, to come to see me in this state."

"I could not, of course, let my own cousin remain ill without seeing him," replied Lady Mallory; "but, to say the truth, I wished to talk with you on one or two subjects. But it may fatigue you, and another time will do."

"Not at all, not at all," replied Mr. Forrest, with a look of anxiety in his countenance. "What is it you have to say?"

"Nothing that is unpleasant," replied Lady Mallory, with a calm smile, but speaking in a clear, distinct tone. "You know, Ferdinand, and I know, that the only way for us to deal with each other is clearly and straightforwardly, in language distinct and without disguise."

"I know that such is your ladyship's custom," replied Mr. Forrest, somewhat bitterly; "you have not been in the habit, towards me at least, of overloading your expressions with sweet things. It is not always a honeyed draught that comes from your ladyship's hands."

"In the present instance, my dear Ferdinand," replied Lady Mallory, with another smile, "as I have nothing at all disagreeable to say, what I have may be expressed in the very plainest words, without giving you the slightest pain."

Mr. Forrest again looked much surprised at this exordium; but Lady Mallory went on. "A report had reached me, Ferdinand—it matters not how—that there was a likelihood of your uniting your daughter Edith to Captain Strafford, the nephew of your present host. Hear me out," she continued, seeing him about to speak. "Now, for reasons of my own—it matters not what—I do not approve of such a union, and I resolved, from the first, to oppose it by every means in my power, and to insist upon its not taking place."

Now, though Mr. Forrest saw that Lady Mallory's views and his own were perfectly the same, his spirit was one that loved not to be dictated to, and never submitted to it in any one who had not power to compel submission. He therefore instantly roused himself at Lady Mallory's tone, and demanded, in a sneering voice, "And pray, my fair cousin Isabella, how came you, by any right or power, to insist upon anything taking place or not taking place in regard to the disposal of my child?"

"Because, my good cousin," replied Lady Mallory, who, being determined to manage the whole business in her own way, had resolved to show Mr. Forrest from the first that she had him in her power, "because, my good cousin—"

But, ere she could conclude her sentence, somebody rose up from behind the curtains on the other side of the bed, and walking round with a low courtesy to Lady Mallory, glided out of the room into a little antechamber or dressing-room beyond, of which she closed the door behind her.

"Who is that? who is that?" demanded Mr. Forrest, eagerly; "who is that that has just gone out of the room?

"Only an old servant," replied Lady Mallory, quietly; "I know her well. She has been watching by you, I suppose, during the night. She has heard nothing of consequence. I know her well, and she is fond of me. But to go on. That which gives me the right and the power, Ferdinand," she added, in a calm, clear voice, "is, that I possess a certificate of the deaths of your brother, Henry Forrest, in India, and his son John, with documents to prove that the boy never even lived to embark for England. Say not a word, Ferdinand, say not a word. You understand me. Put me not upon

the proof of such things by one word of denial. I say that I possess these documents, and that, so far from intending to make use of them, I will place them all in your hands the day after your daughter Edith is married to some other person than to Ralph Strafford."

"She shall never marry him," exclaimed Mr. Forrest, eagerly; "she shall never marry him while I have any power over her."

"So your wife informed me but now," replied Lady Mallory; "and seeing at once, my dear Ferdinand, that there is every probability of our acting together with zeal, harmony, and good-will, all that I wished to converse with you upon was the best means of carrying our intentions into effect."

"The best means are," replied Mr. Forrest, "to marry her immediately to another; and that I will do within three months, if you will promise me, Isabella, one thing; which is, to let me choose that other myself, without one objection on any account whatsoever, without one question as to my motives or my reasons, or how I can reconcile it to my conscience, as you will call it; without, in short, one word or observation of any kind upon the person I choose, either addressed to myself or others."

"Oh," replied Lady Mallory, in an indifferent tone, "that I have nothing to do with; that is your own business entirely."

"Do you promise it, Isabella? Do you promise what I have demanded, in its full terms and complete sense?" demanded Mr. Forrest, raising himself on his arm and gazing eagerly in her face.

"I do," replied Lady Mallory, in some surprise at his eagerness.

"Do you swear it," he added, "by all you hold sacred, by all you hold dear?"

"I do," answered Lady Mallory. "But who is the man?"

"Perhaps my nephew, John Forrest," replied the sick man, sinking back in bed.

Lady Mallory suddenly turned pale as ashes, and shook like an aspen leaf from head to foot, while she exclaimed, "But good God! Ferdinand—"

"Hush!" cried Mr. Forrest, holding up his hand, "hush! remember your oath; leave me and my conscience to settle between us my own acts; I ask you to

take no share in this; I view things in a different light from you. I judge upon different motives. And now to think of the means of guarding against this wilful girl's frustrating all our views, either by art or obstinacy."

"I cannot speak with you about it just yet," said Lady Mallory, rising, still dreadfully agitated; "I must have a little air. I must have a few moments to recover myself."

"Do not go," said Mr. Forrest, seeing her turn towards the door; "go to the window; I told Edith to open it. Go to the window, and you will get air."

Lady Mallory went to the window, and, drawing back the curtain, sat down, where the free fresh air of heaven blowing through the open casement, and the wide expanse of the joyous, cheerful, innocent face of nature, formed a strange contrast with the close, dull room and the dark designs from which she had just turned. It struck her powerfully, terribly; and, pressing her handkerchief upon her eyes, she wept. She remained there some time in thought; but at length, the voice of the sick man exclaiming "Isabella! Isabella!" brought her again to his bedside, and she sat down once more to listen to schemes against the innocent. At first she scarcely mingled in the conversation, and the plans were principally put forth by Mr. Forrest himself.

"In the first place," he said, "I must get well as fast as possible; at least, I must endeavour, at any risk, to get over to your house in a few days. Thus we shall do what we can to check the idle folly of Edith and this young man. But, Isabella, even when she is with you, even were she many miles removed from this place, we must have some better means of keeping a watch upon her than we now have. I feel perfectly certain that yesterday morning, at the very time I received these accursed wounds, Edith and Ralph Strafford had a long and unwatched interview, and, most likely, a full explanation, which I had taken care should not occur in Germany. When I came down as early as possible to guard against such a thing, I found her room vacant. On inquiring of her maid, who fails not, in general, to give me accurate information of all her proceedings, I was told that she was in the picture gallery. Such was not the case; the doors were open, but she was not there. I went out into the park in search of her. I

missed her there, however; but she was certainly out, and this young man also, for he was one of those that carried me home; the one, I believe, who killed the stag. It is impossible to prevent her from going out; and we must have some one who may keep a constant watch upon her when she is out, without her knowing it. Thus gaining certain information of all her proceedings, we may frustrate any secret plan which she may form, or Mrs. Forrest for her."

"From your wife's words to-day," replied Lady Mallory, "I should judge most assuredly that she gave her no encouragement."

"Womanly hypocrisy! Trust it not, trust it not," replied Mr. Forrest; "or, if she gives no encouragement, she gives, at least, connivance. Our only security while she is here—and I fear I could not yet take a journey to London for many a week—our only security would be, if we could get some one to watch her without appearing to do it. Were it but a deer-keeper, a forester, or woodman; any one who could hang about and give instant tidings of where and with whom she has gone out when she leaves the house."

Lady Mallory, after her return from the window, had appeared to be labouring still under some deep and oppressive thoughts, and had suffered Mr. Forrest to go on with his views uninterrupted. She seemed, indeed, to wish to say as little as possible on a topic, the discussion of which appeared suddenly to have become painful to her. But gradually, when once she had broken silence, she was led on quickly to enter upon the matter fully again, and to pursue it apparently with the same eagerness as before.

"Does not the person you speak of," she demanded, "keep the watch himself? Has he no skill, no tact, no policy to make sure that his society shall keep her safe, when others are not with her?"

"Alas, fair lady," replied Forrest, "he is as headstrong and as thoughtless in his way as she is in hers; I might say, even more so. You will scarcely believe it, but, after having seen me lying here, wounded in the severe and terrible manner in which I have been wounded, he proposes to leave me; nay, indeed, is gone this morning, making some dull business the excuse for quitting a dull house."

"Indeed!" cried Lady Mallory, in a tone of surprise,

but mingled with no grief. "Indeed! then he does not love her."

The lip of Mr. Forrest curled with somewhat of a sneer at what he called, in his own mind, so womanly a comment. "Oh, he loves her," replied he, "as well as he loves anything. But he is young, you know, and heedless; and she loves not him, that is clear enough."

Lady Mallory paused and mused; she then replied, however, "Well, my good cousin, you must leave it to a woman's wit to find a person who may keep the watch upon your daughter, as you mention. I think I can undertake to find such a one, and a good actor too; but it will require time; and, till you can remove to my house, you must endeavour to keep this fair Mistress Edith with you as much as may be. One thing I will tell you, however, for your comfort, which is, that I am pretty sure of making myself mistress of all the fair Edith's secrets."

"You know her not, you know her not," replied Mr. Forrest. "She gives not her confidence easily."

"Leave that to me," replied Lady Mallory, in a confident tone, "leave that to me. And now, my good cousin," she added, in a lower voice, "think not of what I said about those papers farther than that they are in the hands of a friend, who will give them up as soon as she sees your daughter the wife of any one but the heir of this house."

Thus saying, Lady Mallory glided away from the bedside, and opened the door into the anteroom.

CHAPTER XII.

On entering the anteroom Lady Mallory perceived the form of Philippina hastily withdrawing from the window, which was open from the ground. There was a small terrace before that part of the house, and it required but a single step to bring any one, by that terrace, from the anteroom to the window of Mr. Forrest's chamber; and Lady Mallory, as she marked all this, remembered that when, in a moment of much agitation, she had sought for fresh air at the casement, a rustle, as

of somebody moving away, had struek her ear, but received no attention.

The sight of Philippina and the aspect of the German recalled the circumstance to her mind, and gave her more than suspicion. Not that the countenance of Philippina displayed the least particle of shame and bashfulness, for her bright black eye fixed bold and unshrinking upon the beautiful countenance of Lady Mallory; but there was an eager and flashing light in that dark eye, a knitting of the heavy brow, and a bright red spot in each of the pale cheeks, which indicated clearly that she had not passed the last solitary hour without excitement.

In matters where any but the *one* passion was concerned, the quick and decided spirit of Lady Mallory instantly shone forth; and raising her proud head high, she walked straight forward towards Philippina, saying at once, in plain terms, "You have been listening."

"I have, madam," replied Philippina, with the same spirit within her, and with her eye remaining steady and unabashed; "I have been listening, and I heard everything you said but the last ten words."

Their eyes met sternly, and gazed into each other.

"You think you have me in your power," said Lady Mallory, "and you are already meditating ingratitude for my kindness to you; but you may find yourself mistaken!"

"I think nothing at all, miladi, but that you are a very great lady, and a very beautiful lady, and *were* a very good lady, and always kind and good to everybody; but now you are going to do a very evil thing; and though I be a poor person, and nothing at all compared with you, I do not scruple to tell you so."

"Philippina," replied Lady Mallory, somewhat softening her tone, "I will pass over the meanness of your listening to my conversation—"

"I did not wish to listen to your conversation, miladi," interrupted Philippina; "I wished to listen to what *he* said, and to do that I have a right!"

"A right!" cried Lady Mallory. "But that matters not! You could not listen to his words without listening to mine, and I say that, passing over that offence, which I could punish perhaps more severely than you know, I will forgive you, and do nothing against you if you will do three things."

"I do not know," replied Philippina, with an inquiring air, "I do not know how you could punish me at all."

"By going out of this room," replied Lady Mallory; "by seeking Sir Andrew Stalbrooke directly, and by informing him that I had detected you in listening to the conversation between myself and my cousin, Mr. Forrest, and that you implied a threat of charging me with evil designs in that conversation if I exposed your eavesdropping!" She fixed her eyes sternly upon the German, and Philippina seemed somewhat startled. "You will determine in one minute," said Lady Mallory, seeing the effect she had produced, "whether you will do what I am about to require of you; for, if you do not, as sure as I live I shall act as I have stated. You will see whether Sir Andrew Stalbrooke will give credit to me or to you."

"I did not want to charge you with any evil designs, miladi," replied Philippina, "except that of marrying this poor young lady to a man that she hates and detests, who is the greatest villain under the sun, and who dared to draw his sword upon Sir Andrew himself, because his worship prevented him from wronging a poor girl in the village. To make her marry him, whether she likes it or not, I do call evil."

"Philippina, you have mistaken me," said Lady Mallory, in a much lower tone, and with a softened expression of countenance; "it is *his* wish that she should marry John Forrest! But it is so far from mine," she added, bending her eyes deeply and impressively upon the German, "but it is so far from mine, Philippina, that I would rather lay down this right hand and have it cut off, than have anything to do with the marriage of those two."

"It is a pretty hand too," said Philippina, gazing in Lady Mallory's face; "but, then, what is it that you did design, miladi?"

"To prevent her marrying Ralph Strafford," replied Lady Mallory, in a tone scarcely audible, and with the colour, which had been scarcely heightened by two shades while making the same avowal to Mr. Forrest, mounting high and bright into her cheek and brow now that she spoke it to a woman.

Philippina paused thoughtfully, and then replied, "With that and with your reasons, madam, I have no

business to meddle, if you do not seek to do the very evil thing I thought. But you said, if I would do something for you, you would say no more of my having listened. What is it that you wish me to do?"

"I will make sure of you, Philippina, in all ways," replied Lady Mallory; "first, you shall tell me all that you have heard."

Lady Mallory paused, and the German did as she demanded, showing that, though she might have miscomprehended some things, she had heard almost all.

"Secondly," continued Lady Mallory, as soon as she had done, "as you have heard the sort of person whose assistance we want, you must procure that person for us. But of that we will talk more in a minute, if you consent to do your best to find one."

"I do," replied Philippina.

"And now," continued Lady Mallory, "in order to make perfectly sure that you do not reveal one word of what you have heard, you shall promise—but no," she continued, correcting herself, "you shall agree and put down in your own hand in writing to take a share in my purposes, and to aid them to the best of your power. I mean, that you shall promise to do everything you can to prevent Ralph Strafford from marrying Edith Forrest."

"Oh, that is very hard," cried Philippina, "that is very hard indeed. He has been always kind to me. I tended him when he was quite young. . Well," she continued, after pausing for a minute, and seeing Lady Mallory's eyes still fixed sternly upon her, "well, it does not much matter. He will be quite as happy with one as with another. Will you write it down for me, miladi? There is the pen and ink the doctor had."

"No," answered Lady Mallory, "you must write it yourself, if you can write our language."

"Oh, I can write quite good English," replied Philippina, taking the pen; and she wrote down on a sheet of paper, with considerable fluency and accuracy, "I do hereby promise to do everything that I can to prevent Captain Ralph Strafford from marrying Miss Edith Forrest;" and, when she had thus written, she signed it with her name.

Lady Mallory took it up, and having read it over with a well pleased smile, folded it carefully and put it in

her bosom, saying, "Now, Philippina, we are friends, and embarked in the same adventure."

Philippina hung her head, as if not so well pleased with what had passed; but she looked up again the next moment, and demanded, "And now, miladi, what was it you said about some one to serve you?"

Lady Mallory now entered into all the details which we have already heard in some degree discussed between Mr. Forrest and herself, regarding the qualities and character of the person whom she wanted to watch the movements of Edith Forrest and her lover. But Lady Mallory went far beyond what she had stated to Mr. Forrest himself. She did not exactly say so; but she made Philippina understand that she sought to have an eye on all, Mr. Forrest and his nephew included; that to her all information was to be given; that through her, and through her alone, it was to be communicated to others; that she, in fact, was to know, and rule, and guide those around her, for the purpose, as it appeared by her own showing, first, of cutting off any private communication between Ralph Strafford and Edith Forrest, and, secondly, of preventing Mr. Forrest's purpose of uniting Edith to his nephew.

Philippina had seen and known Lady Mallory during her husband's lifetime, and especially during the long and tedious illness which preceded his death, ruling his household and his large property with a firm and steady hand, displaying all those qualities of accuracy, precision, forethought, and determination, seldom coveted or possessed by women, and acting under difficult circumstances with a powerful and vigorous mind. But now there seemed something added; a fire and energy which breathed out in all that she said or did, and gave a tone of commanding power to her whole words and demeanour. The secret of a new, strong passion, in short, broke forth. Like her framed by the demigod, whatever were her beauties and perfections, they had been cold and comparatively inactive till that moment, when they blazed forth, touched by the true fire of heaven. We know not ourselves, and others know not, what are our capabilities and our powers till some strong passion moves the heart, and, like the mainspring of a complicated piece of machinery, sets in motion all the wheels of life.

The German listened with some surprise, and then

fell into thought, while Lady Mallory still went on suggesting, devising, explaining. At length Philippina stopped her. "I think I can do it, madam," she said; "I think I can find the person that you mean. But I must inquire; I must see. If I am right, I will bring you an answer this evening, or send you one, for perhaps I may not be able to come, as I am forced to attend to poor Lucy, the daughter of Williams the schoolmaster, who is buried to-day."

"Ah, poor Williams!" exclaimed Lady Mallory, "I heard of his death, and his daughter's deep sorrow for him. I think somebody told me that he had left her but poorly provided for. She was a nice, sweet girl, a little wild and fanciful; but I recollect her well, aiding her father in the village school, and all the children loved her. Is it true that her father left her but little?"

"Nothing at all, madam, but debts and sorrow," replied Philippina.

"Poor child! we must do something for her," said Lady Mallory taking out her purse. "Give her these ten guineas, Philippina, for me, and bid her, when she is sufficiently well and composed, come up to see me at the Hall. I will do what I can for her. I should think that she was fit to be a governess."

"I will send her up, madam," replied Philippina, "and will, as I have said, come up myself or send this very evening."

"Let it be after dark, good Philippina," replied Lady Mallory, thinking of the promised visit of Ralph Strafford. "Let it be after dark, then I can speak with you more freely."

Philippina made no objection, and after a word or two more, Lady Mallory, satisfied with what she had done, proceeded to the room where she had left Mrs. Forrest and Edith. She there paused for a few minutes, speaking with them both in a quiet and friendly tone, gazing from time to time upon the countenance of Edith Forrest with an earnest and thoughtful look, in which those who knew her heart might have discovered that regret, perhaps sorrow, had a share; but, for the time at least, neither regret nor sorrow altered the purposes of her bosom.

"I am somewhat fatigued," she said at length. "This visit has been a great exertion to me after my late illness, and, though I long to see my good old friend,

Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, I fear I cannot wait for his return. Pray make my excuses to him, Mrs. Forrest, and put my young friend, Ralph, in mind, that he promised me a visit this afternoon, to explain what he left unexplained yesterday. You see," she continued to Mrs. Forrest, with a smile, "you see that I take the cold privilege of elderly ladies, Mrs. Forrest, and invite young men to come and visit me. I suppose it is, Mrs. Forrest, for the simple reason that, if we did not, we should not be visited at all."

She spoke with a gay smile, and certainly her words were calculated to deceive. If every sentence that is spoken in the world were traced through the fine channels of thought and feeling back to the original motive in the heart, how many should we find calculated to display truth, how many to veil it? The man who said that language was given to us for the purpose of concealing our thoughts, would have pronounced a sublime truth if he had contented himself with saying that such was the purpose to which man applies it.

Was Edith Forrest deceived? She was not; for it is scarcely possible for two women to love the same man, without each discovering her rival instantly. It came not, indeed, to the mind of Edith Forrest as a conviction; it came but as a doubt, a suspicion, an apprehension; and it was sufficient to make her heart sink with doubt, with anxiety, and grief.

Sir Andrew Stalbrooke and his nephew returned about half an hour after Lady Mallory had left the house. Edith heard Mrs. Forrest give the message to Ralph Strafford, who smiled, and with so calm and unconcerned an air, that Edith felt she was secure there at least. A few minutes afterward he had an opportunity of saying to her in a low voice, "I am going over, dearest Edith, to tell sweet Lady Mallory, who is as kind as the air of heaven, all about our love, and to beg her assistance, and her influence with your father."

Had Edith yielded to the first impulse, she would have exclaimed, "Oh, do not, do not." But there were people near: she had a moment for reflection; and she thought, "It may be as well that she should know of our love and our engagement; then, if she be as kind and as generous as people say, she will conquer her own feelings, and perhaps give us her aid."

She replied nothing, then, but cast down her eyes,

and shortly after returned to the chamber of Mr. Forrest.

In the mean time Lady Mallory returned home, and passed the day partly in thought, partly in reading, when thought became so intense as to be painful. Her mind was made up how to act; she had seen Edith Forrest, and her eyes were too keen and clear not to perceive at once that there was that mingling of fine qualities of mind and beautiful qualities of heart which, to a man of such a disposition as Ralph Strafford, forms the most engaging of all characters. She could not but own, also, that Edith was extremely pretty; but, at the same time, she felt a proud consciousness of superior beauty. She felt that, though nothing, perhaps, could surpass Edith in grace and loveliness of form, yet that even in that grace and loveliness she was herself not inferior. She judged also, and rightly, that her figure, from its height, was more dignified and majestic, while from the full roundness of every limb it lost not one particle of softer beauty. In feature, too, she felt that she had decidedly the advantage; and though she thought, with a sigh, of some few years of youth gone by, yet she believed that the deep feelings which she experienced now, and which she had never experienced in youth, if they could but be known to him she loved, must overpower anything like prepossession in favour of another, whom she could not and would not believe to be capable of loving as she did herself. How then, how, she asked herself, could she make that love known to Strafford? She was not weak enough or unwise enough to risk, by any rash avowal, the loss of his esteem as well as of his heart; and she determined, while she raised up inseparable barriers between him and Edith Forrest, to listen kindly, nay, tenderly, to his tale of love towards her rival; to seem even to counsel and assist him; to make him feel that she was doing so solely from regard for him; to let him see that she was unhappy, and pique his curiosity to learn why, but not to gratify that curiosity in any degree till his union with Edith had been rendered impossible by her marriage with another, and then only to lead him by indirect means to suspect that the cause of her own conduct, her grief, and her agitation, might be in some degree affection towards himself.

Such was the rule that she laid down for her beha-

viour, and to pursue this course skilfully, firmly, and perseveringly, she now bent every energy of her mind. The calmness which she had assumed the night before continued; she governed, she ruled every impulse of the mind or body; she became, as it were, an instrument in the hands of her own purpose, resisting everything but its guidance, and overpowering everything that opposed it.

It must not be supposed, however, that towards the hour at which she expected Strafford's visit she was not agitated by manifold emotions. Her heart thrilled, her whole spirit seemed moved, and the joy of his presence contended with painful thoughts regarding the subject on which he was about to speak, in a manner which would have totally overpowered her under any other circumstances. But at length, the sound of his horse's feet was heard, the bell rang in the porch; and then, with a powerful effort, she cleared away every sign of emotion, remaining ready to receive him in the calm dignity of surpassing beauty and unaffected grace.

When he appeared she made him sit down beside her on the sofa, and after a few words upon ordinary topics, an inquiry or two concerning the state of Mr. Forrest that afternoon, and a reproachful message to Sir Andrew Stalbrooke for not coming to see her, Lady Mallory proceeded with a faint but melancholy smile, saying, "Well, Ralph, I have seen your fair lady this morning, you know, and I think she is a very pretty little creature indeed."

The terms in which she spoke of Edith, though laudatory, did not at all satisfy the feelings of Ralph Strafford; but that, perhaps, is the case with all lovers; at least we are told so; and as he paused without reply, Lady Mallory went on to ask, "You told me yesterday that there was something connected with this attachment of yours, in regard to which you wished for counsel and assistance. Now I need not tell you, Ralph, that I shall be most happy, if there is anything on earth that I can do for you, either by my influence, or assistance, or advice, to exert myself to the utmost of my abilities."

There was a slight glistening in her eye like a drop of dew in the cup of a flower, which might proceed merely from the eagerness with which she spoke: but she felt that it was there; she feared that the drop

might run over upon her cheek, and her colour came brightly up, making her look more beautiful than ever. This was all nature, and so far nature acted far better for her than art could have done. After a momentary pause she shook her head, with a playful smile at her own embarrassment, and added, before Strafford could reply, "I may surely make you these professions, Ralph, without colouring in this way, as if I were sixteen, when I am older than yourself in the first place, and, in the next, you come to consult me how to obtain the hand of another woman."

This was nature and art combined, and it answered its purpose as well as she could possibly have desired; for the first idea that it suggested to the mind of Ralph Strafford was the possibility that had existed of his falling in love with Lady Mallory after her husband's death, which was followed again by the idea of the very great probability of such a thing taking place; and then, when he gazed on her beauty and thought of her talents, her graces, her good qualities, he wondered that it had not been the case before he met with Edith Forrest. What was the difference of a year or two in their age? Was not Lady Mallory still in the bright freshness of her youth? was she not now as beautiful, perhaps more beautiful, than she had been ten years before? Why, then, had he, when he admired, esteemed, and liked her; why, then, had he, circumstanced as they were, not loved her also? All that he could answer to his own question was that he had never thought of it; that he had been accustomed so long to think of Lady Mallory as the wife of Lord Mallory, that even when that tie was broken, he had never thought or reflected that her widowhood placed her hand within his reach.

All this passed through his mind in a moment, so rapidly as by no means to impede his reply to Lady Mallory. "If I might not consult you, Lady Mallory, and you might not give kind assistance to me," he said, "to whom should I venture to apply, for who do I know so well? who has ever treated me with such unvarying kindness as yourself?" Lady Mallory cast down her eyes, and a long, deep sigh read a comment upon Strafford's words. Without noticing it, however, he went on to give her the whole account of his meeting with Edith in Germany, their attachment to each other, the conduct of Mr. Forrest, the explanation which had ta-

ken place between him and Edith since they had again met, and the difficulties and obstacles which threatened to oppose them from her father's determined opposition, and views in regard to John Forrest.

Lady Mallory paused in thought, and, to say the truth, she hesitated. She was about to take the first decided step in a course of deceit; she was going to give advice, the tendency of which was directly opposite to that which she attributed to it. She loved not the task; it was painful to her. She felt shame, she felt remorse; but strong passion triumphed; and compelling her spirit to be calm, she replied, "Oh, you very well know, my dear Ralph, that in all these affairs of love, in play, romance, and poem, from the beginning of the world even to the present day, there is always some cruel father who opposes the happiness of the lovers, and is either in the end softened by some unexpected circumstance, or teased into an unwilling consent by prayers and importunities. In real life it would seem also," she continued, remarking that he did not seem altogether to like the tone of raillery in which she spoke, "in real life it would seem also that there is ever some obstacle to be overcome, as if to test affection, or, perhaps, to strengthen and invigorate it, lest it should die or grow old as soon as gratified. The only way, I believe, in such circumstances, is to have patience. If you attempt to overleap all barriers, you will find them multiply around you; for fate, depend upon it, takes a pleasure in thwarting those who think that they can overrule her will. Take patience, Ralph; wait calmly and quietly till the period fixed by her father for demanding her decision has arrived. Were I in your place, I should not even suffer my attachment to appear too strongly. Give time, and, depend upon it, all difficulties will be conquered; but, if you remark, it is ever by striving to press forward the march of events that men plunge themselves and those they love into difficulties, from which they sometimes find it impossible to extricate themselves."

For a minute or two Strafford made no reply, pondering over what she said; and Lady Mallory added, after falling into a fit of abstraction for a minute or two, "Of course I need not ask you, Ralph, if you are very sure that the feelings which you experience towards this young lady are really those of love; that love, I mean,

which will be durable, lasting, and sufficient to compensate for all the evils and the pangs of life."

The words that she made use of might not have struck Ralph Strafford, had it not been for the tone that she employed. But that tone was sad, solemn, almost stern; and after gazing in her face for a moment with somewhat of surprise, his only reply was an exclamation.

"Good God, dear Lady Mallory!" he said, "what is it that you mean?"

"I mean, Ralph," she replied, in the same sad tone, "that in these matters both man and woman often deceive themselves. Struck by beauties and graces, or, perhaps, not even that; attracted by some high or noble qualities, by services mutually rendered and kindnesses experienced; ignorant, by never having felt it, of what real love is, they very often marry with high esteem, regard, affection, even admiration, thinking that they love truly and shall love always. Then come the little inconveniences and discomforts that ever mingle in the cup of domestic life, be they cares, be they anxieties, be they any of the many things that would pass over real love, leaving it unsullied like breath upon the diamond. Now, however, each one leaves a trace, a discomfort, a remembrance: the false stone and the real jewel, Ralph, are tried by the scratches ordinary instruments will make upon them. But oh! Ralph Strafford, if the time should come when the master tone of the human heart is struck by some other being than that to whom our fate is linked; when we know and feel for the first time what real love is; when suddenly it flashes upon us in all its intensity, in all its brightness, in all its overpowering strength, then, then, how awful is the situation of those who have mistaken the feelings of their own hearts; who have not, in the first instance, inquired, with eager anxiety, 'Do I know what real love is? do I feel it?' Oh, how awful is that moment!"

"And do you mean to say, Lady Mallory," exclaimed Strafford, with deep interest, "do you mean to say that such has been your own fate?"

The blood rushed up over her neck, and face, and brow in the deepest crimson. "No! no! no!" she exclaimed, vehemently, "No! I did not say so. Ralph Strafford, can you ask the question, who have known me so long and well? No! no! Oh no! There is not

any one on earth has a right to say that I, the wife of Lord Mallory, ever gave one thought to any other man on earth."

"I know it, I am sure of it, dear Lady Mallory," replied Ralph, taking her hand kindly in his; but she drew it back again instantly, saying, "No! no! you have mistaken me, Mr. Strafford! All I meant to say was, that the most important question in this life which man or woman should put to their own heart when they seek to unite their fate to another, is, 'Do I love this being with all the power, passion, and intensity of which my nature is capable?' It is upon the answer to that question that the weal and wo of their future existence altogether depends; ay, and with a depth and profundity of joy or grief which none can know, till the question is answered and the step taken. But you have asked your heart that question, Ralph, and it has answered that you do. Is it not so?"

"It is indeed," answered Strafford; "I have asked my heart that question, and I have found that my love for Edith is not such as can ever fail or fade; that it is rooted irradicably in my bosom; a part of my existence, that ends but with my being. Before I knew her, I may have met, admired, and fancied for the time I loved many another; but the difference of all my feelings towards her shows me how vain and empty were all my feelings towards others. For her sake I could be cold to all the earth; to me she is hope and sunshine; without her the world would seem to have no light. Absence, long absence, and absence without hope, has tried that love, but never altered it. Even when I thought that there might be some blame attached to her for her conduct towards me, I loved her still, forgave the pain I suffered, and prayed for her happiness who I thought had deprived me of mine."

Lady Mallory had turned her face slightly away, and the blood which had lately crimsoned it had left it and flowed back again to her heart. The hand which she had withdrawn from Strafford's, and which lay upon the sofa, slightly contracted; but she said not a word for a moment or two, and then only added, "Of course she has asked herself the same question, and received the same reply."

"I do not know," replied Strafford; "but if she have not, I will ask it."

"And she will answer you as you wish," replied Lady Mallory, in a lighter tone; "however, what we have now to consider is how to overcome the obstacles to your union with her who loves you so. I will do everything that I can to aid you and to make you happy. You had better not, however, press your advance too eagerly, lest you spoil all. With time, depend upon it, success crowns perseverance; and now I suppose, Strafford, you have no objection to my letting your fair Edith know that you have made me your confidant in this business. The consultation of two women on such a theme is more likely to be to the purpose than that of a woman and a man. Have you any objection?"

"Not in the least, not in the least," replied Strafford. "I informed her of my intention myself."

"And what did she say?" demanded Lady Mallory, eagerly.

"She said nothing," replied Strafford.

Lady Mallory was silent for a moment, and then said, "You see, Ralph, the shades of evening are beginning to fall. I will not detain you any longer. For my part, I will do the best for you, and hope, I am sure, that what I do will be for your happiness. It shall not be my fault if it is not."

Strafford now rose and took his leave; but, on descending to the porch, he found that his horse had been taken to the stable, and several minutes elapsed before it was brought round. He had sufficient matter of thought, however, in all that had lately passed, and he hardly observed that the night was coming rapidly on. He took what might be called the thoughtful road homeward, that is, the least frequented one, and was approaching Stalbrooke Castle by the green lanes which led up from the common towards the back of the park, with a glorious moon shedding its light upon his path, when he heard, as it were, a suppressed scream, and listened to ascertain whether it proceeded from real fear or pain, or was merely uttered in some village jest. For a minute the scream was not repeated; but in the stillness of the hour he heard a noise of scuffling and trampling, and voices speaking low, and the next instant a tongue that he recognised exclaimed, "She has got the handkerchief off;" and two or three loud screams followed, succeeding each other without intermission. Ralph Strafford put his horse into a gallop, and rapidly approached the spot.

CHAPTER XIII.

About an hour after nightfall, on the evening of the burial of Lucy's father, there were three men sitting together upon the extreme edge of that common, which we have had occasion to mention more than once, under a high sandy bank, lying to the westward of the Plague road, that is to say, nearer to the park of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke.

The broken ground, with its high bank, covered on the top with furze and brambles, with here and there a thin birch-tree or a hawthorn hanging over it, might either have afforded a very pleasant shelter on a warm, hot, sunshiny summer day, or a comfortable protected nook against the cold wintry wind. Why it should have been selected particularly, however, as a place of repose at the time we speak of, would be more difficult to say, as the night was bright and clear, with scarcely a breath of wind stirring the calm, sweet air, and the moon was clear in the sky, without even the favourite thin veil of a white cloud. There was one thing, indeed, to be remarked in regard to the spot, which was, that from the little dingle or old sandpit—for that had, most probably, been its origin—there wound away a deep gulley or ravine to the spot where two roads crossed at the angle of Stalbrooke Park.

The angle of the park wall itself was at about two hundred yards' distance; but the gulley, with its high banks, opening out wider in that direction, formed a sort of speaking-trumpet or *Dionysius's lug*, which enabled any person sitting in that sandpit to hear all that passed upon either of those roads much more distinctly than the distance would have permitted under any other circumstances.

All such little particulars and features of the country round, the capabilities of every spot of ground, and the nature and quality of every inch of earth, were all keenly marked, noted down, and remembered by our good friend Timothy Meakes; ever, be it remembered, with direct thought, foresight, and reference towards the birds, and beasts, and creeping things in which his nat-

ural affections chiefly centred. His topographical and feratrinagraphical surveys, however, proved to him and to others extremely useful on manifold occasions; and he did not scruple to assert himself, that more than one battle had been won, and more than one pretty manœuvre effected, from information in regard to the country acquired by him while prowling about in search of his forbidden fruit. His knowledge of the dingle or sandpit just mentioned, its *embouchure* upon the two roads, and the facilities it afforded for hearing even a light step upon either of them, had directed his choice on the present occasion, when, to use his own expression, it was necessary for him to have all his eyes about him.

He, then, was at the head of the party seated in the dell; but as he was, according to his custom, somewhat earlier than the time he expected to be wanted, he was not yet waiting in listening expectation, but conversed with his two companions, or broke sticks and laid them on a fire which he had lighted; not on account of feeling the slightest lack of warmth in the atmosphere, but out of old associations and memories both of the bivouac and the poacher's fire.

"So, Jim," he said, speaking to one of the other men, "the vagabond asked you what relation I was to her?"

"Ay, he asked a power of questions," replied the man, "not only of me, but of others, and he found out all about it, I'll warrant him."

"Ah! ah!" said Meakes. "Now he thinks himself a fox; there's not an old dog-fox in the whole country that has got a longer brush than he thinks he has! Leave Tim Meakes, however, for a tally-ho. I saw he was shy this morning when he was talking to me about it, and pretending to believe everything that I said, and promising to do all that I told him. I saw that he was shy, for he kept stretching out his neck and peering about like a hen partridge with her late covey in the clover. I said not a word, however, to let him see that I had found out anything; but, for all the world like a trout under a bank, I kept my head to the stream and my tail gently waggling in the ripple, just as if I were going to rise at the fly, but seeing my angler all the time, and ready to dart away the next minute. As soon as he was gone, telling me that he was going back to the castle and would come and consult more with me to-morrow, I watched him down the Plague road out of

the windows, and then, when I found he was getting out of sight of that bough, I hopped up to the twig above, and watched from the top windows, and there I saw that, at the other edge of the common, there was a servant waiting with a horse; so that, when he mounted and made off, not at all to the castle but towards Lallington, I got on horseback too, and dodged him across the country. Then I knew that when he was down here before he used to go to the Red Lion; so I went there, and waited for a while, till I found out that he had ordered a postchaise and four to be where I told you; so that I knew directly he had taken up part of my scheme, and intended to pretend to arrest poor Lucy and carry her off, but to do it at night instead of in the day, and without letting me know anything about it. As soon as I found out that, I galloped as hard as I could, and got back in time for the funeral, without anybody knowing anything of the matter."

"But I say, sir," replied one of the men, who, to say truth, was nothing better than the most notorious poacher in the neighbourhood, but who treated Meakes with all that reverence shown by a poor professor to a wealthy amateur; "but I say, sir, suppose they were to take the other way with the carriage."

"Not they," replied Meakes; "not they. He's not such a beast as to go galloping like a hair, with its ears up and its head down, right up to the feet of a man with a gun in his hand. Why, if they took the other way, they must go through the village, and there's plenty of people up and stirring. Besides, I've stopped that earth too. I've left Joe Wilson with my nag out at the other end of the lane, and if they come that way, he's to follow at all speed: but, hark ye, did ye not hear a sound?"

They all listened attentively, and now clearly heard the sound of some people's feet walking along the rough and gravelly road which passed just outside of the park wall. There was a murmur of voices speaking, too, but neither in a low nor a hurried tone. It was the sound of some persons conversing quietly and leisurely as they strolled along the road; and Meakes observed, in a whisper to his companions, "It must be some of the labourers going home; but I don't know who can be passing this way either, and I know every man in the place. Shoot me, if that isn't the voice of Stiles, the fighting shoemaker, at Lallington."

"Ay, that it is," answered one of the men who came with him; "and that other's the voice of merry old Soames, who was burned in the hand, and, as he says, sings never the worse for that. He's from Lallington too. I'll bet you any money that they are both here upon this business, Master Meakes."

"Ay, that they are," replied Meakes. "They've come to *do* the bailiff and his bum; but what they're doing up here I should like to know. They must have altered their plan. Give me the gun, Jim, and I'll creep after them, and see what they are doing."

"Take care what you are about, Master Meakes," said one of the men. "They'll see you, if you don't mind, as you get over the bank in the moonlight."

"Lord bless ye!" was Meakes's only reply; and gliding up the bank as if he had no corporeal substance at all, Meakes thrust himself through the furze bushes on the top, crawling on his belly like a serpent, so that the method of his passing was scarcely perceptible even to his companions in the pit below. Thus taking advantage of every swell, and knoll, and bush, he crept along, guided by the noise of the feet upon the road, till he reached a spot opposite the angle of the park, where the sound of feet ceased entirely, and it was evident that the two men had stopped.

As soon as Meakes had ascertained that such was the case, he began gliding on again towards the spot where he calculated that they must stand, from time to time pausing, raising himself a little on his elbow, and looking over every bank or knoll that happened to be in the way. At length he obtained a sight of the end of the road, and a more wild or romantic spot certainly could never be seen than that which lay before his eyes at that moment. From the road up to the basis of the park wall was a soft broken bank of yellow sand and turf, crowned with oaks and chestnuts, similar to those within the park itself, and on the opposite side was a wild, irregular piece of woodland ground, the inequalities of which cast the trees wherewith it was planted into every sort of fantastic position. Between, lay the rich-coloured gravelly road, running away from the eye down a steep descent, while the other road was seen crossing it between the common and the wood.

The moon was shining bright, as we have said, upon the common and upon the transverse road; but the

other highway down into the valley was darkened by the thick wood and tall trees on the one side, and by the bank, the park walls, and the beeches and ashes on the other side; so that there was nothing to be seen upon that road but profound and deepening masses of foliage—here and there streaked and marked by the white boughs and large branches of the trees—and the yellow line of road itself becoming more and more indistinct, as it plunged into the shadows. At the end of the wood, however, just opposite to Meakes, the beams of the clear mellow moon poured in among the trunks of the beeches and oaks, and tipped the soft mossy undulations of the ground, or the rugged banks of yellow sand, with pure and golden light. By the time he reached a spot where he could see without being seen, the two men whom he was watching had seated themselves under those very trees among which the moonlight was streaming, and apparently waited for some addition to their party. Every word that they spoke, except a few that dropped from time to time into an under tone, was heard by the old soldier; and he distinctly made out, not only that they were waiting for somebody, but that that somebody was John Forrest himself.

"I'll bet you a shilling to a dollar," said one of the men, "that he makes a mess of the matter now."

"Oh, not he, not he," replied the other. "He says the girl's very willing to come, and only wants a little gentle force to persuade her, like."

"Ay, ay, he tells you so," replied the other; "but no girl that loves a man needs any gentle force at all; if she does, she loves her own conceit better than him. Besides, Master Stiles, all this here preparation, does it look like a little gentle force? What's the handkerchief to tie her mouth for, and all that?"

"Well, Soames, you mind your own business," answered the other. "We've nothing to do but to believe what he tells us, so long as he pays us. Hold your tongue, if you can't talk to better purpose. Some one might overhear your nonsense about force."

"Oh, there's no one up in this place to hear anything one says," replied the other.

"One can't tell that," answered Stiles; "and if you must use your tongue, why sing us a song; one of your old ditties that you used to sing at the Cat and the Fiddlestick. Can't you sing us about the green leaf, now that we are under it?"

"With all my heart," answered Soames; "I'll sing to the day of my drowning."

"Or of your hanging," answered Stiles.

"Why, I'll sing then too," answered Soames, not a whit offended, "for I shall sing out: but here goes, Master Bully," and he began his song; but he pitched it upon a wrong note, so that he had to begin again; and while Meakes, under favour of the noise he made, crept quietly away to his companions in the pit, old Soames, as he was called, went on to the following effect:

THE GREEN LEAF.

"The green leaf, the green leaf, there's nothing like the green leaf
So said the wild deer under the bough:
To cornfields and cities, and man's dwellings leave grief,
There's nothing like the green leaf, on all the earth, I vow

The glad lark in the sky carols forth his gay strain,
Hovering, quivering in the sunny light,
But when his song is done, down drops the merry lark again
Under the green leaf, to pant with delight.
The green leaf, the green leaf, there's nothing like the green leaf,
So said the wild deer under the bough.

Lo! the little villager, with her bonnet tied in haste,
Stealing through the copse by the lone river's side,
What makes her beating heart break the riband round her waist?
Lo, through the green leaf, Harry by her side!
The green leaf, the green leaf, there's nothing like the green leaf,
So said the wild deer under the bough."

"Ay, Muster Soames," said Stiles, "I should think that you had had enough of those trades in the green leaf. One thing I know, and that is, that you burned your fingers with them."

"It was the palm of my hand, cobbler," replied Soames, "and I didn't do that a purpose."

"Hark!" cried the other, "he is coming; I hear him now."

As his sharp ear told him, a quick step was at that moment coming rapidly up the road, and in another instant Forrest was by their side. He was evidently a great deal agitated, and he said hastily, in a low voice, "She is coming! she is coming this way. Now, are you ready?"

"Why I thought we were to go down," said Stiles, "to arrest her for a joke, as it were."

"That is all spared," answered Forrest, quickly;

"as I was going through the village to make sure that all was quiet, I saw her coming out of her own door, and watched her up to the end of the common, and on to this road, after which I ran round as fast as I could. I can't have missed her, surely. She could be coming nowhere but here. She must have been coming to the castle."

"Not she," answered Soames; "she would never go to the castle this way. She may be going to Madame Philippina's, perhaps."

"Right, right," said Forrest, "right. I saw that German Jezebel in the cottage; right. But I do not hear her coming. It is very strange!"

"Why, you have run so fast, sir, you must have distanced her," said Stiles; "you are quite out of breath."

"You know where the carriage stands?" demanded Forrest, without attending to what was said. "Carry her there as fast as possible. Put her in on the left-hand side; you will find a key in the door. Lock it, while I get in at the other."

He paused, and fell into deep thought. It seemed as if something moved him to compassion, perhaps remorse, and he was heard to mutter something, of which the only audible words were "Poor girl—after all!"

At that very moment, however, the light, graceful form of Lucy Williams, clad in deep black and wrapped in a large cloak, came up into the moonlight. Her step was quick, but scarcely steady; yet she seemed to entertain no apprehensions, for she walked calmly on, without either looking to the right or left, as if treading a road to which she was well accustomed. The two men were about to dart forward upon her at once; but Forrest, stretching forth his arm, held them back for a moment. As he did so, the sound of a distant horse's feet came upon the wind, and withdrawing his arm almost immediately, he said, "Now!"

The two bloodhounds, whom he had engaged in the base act he was about to perpetrate, sprang forward like tigers on their prey. In a moment poor Lucy was seized by both arms, and, suddenly surprised and terrified, she uttered one piercing cry. The moment after, however, a thick handkercheif was tied over her mouth, hurting her in a brutal manner, and she was dragged along towards the common, struggling, but struggling, as it seemed, in vain. The efforts, however,

which she herself made, and those of the men who held her, to prevent her from freeing her hands, caused the handkerchief to slip off her mouth, and at the same moment the joyful sound of a horse's quick-coming feet met her ear. She now uttered scream after scream as loud as possible; and though she was still dragged on towards the common, she saw with joy—for with the happy confidence of youth she fancied that every one must be the natural enemies of those who were committing so cruel a wrong—the forms of three men starting, as it were, out of the earth upon the common, and rushing rapidly towards those who were carrying her away.

Before, however, we follow her fate any farther, we must turn to another of our characters, who was by this time taking part in an episode closely connected with the fortunes of poor Lucy Williams.

CHAPTER XIV.

We have said in the twelfth chapter, that Ralph Strafford galloped on at full speed, and just at the angle of the wall of Stalbrooke Park where it joined the common, the forms of three men met his eye, engaged in what was evidently an act of brutal violence towards a woman. There were only two indeed who were taking a very active share in the business; the third was a step behind, and seemed rather directing than acting. Seeing a horseman, however, come up at full gallop, the latter turned upon him and threw himself directly in the way, while the light of the moon fell full upon them, and each recognised the other.

Forrest, however—now plunged irretrievably into the dark and dangerous undertaking to which angry vanity, as much as any other passion, had hurried him—well knew and felt that retreat was out of the question, and that he must boldly pursue and justify the course in which he was engaged. He caught the bridle of Captain Strafford's horse, therefore, at once exclaiming, "Strafford, this is no business of yours; you will be better away!"

"Out of my way, sir!" cried Strafford, spurring on his horse, and almost throwing his opponent over. "I know not and care not what you are about. But, by Heaven—"

"If you do not hold back I will kill your horse," cried Forrest, drawing his sword; but Strafford drew his at the same moment, and without pausing for reflection, for he still heard the screams of poor Lucy Williams as she was dragged away, he struck his opponent a violent blow on the head with the hilt of the sword in his clinched hand, which threw him headlong beneath the horse's feet.

Without waiting to see whether he was hurt or not, Strafford pushed on his horse, galloped to the common, and there again caught sight of the two men, who for a moment had been hidden from his sight by the trees, still dragging on Lucy Williams, but pursued at full speed by three other men, who were gaining quickly upon them.

Not knowing, however, whether the three that followed were not bent upon the same mischief as the others, Strafford paused not in his course, but galloped on, thinking only how he, pitted against unequal numbers, might employ his strength to the greatest advantage. He would have acted in the same manner had he known the injured person to be the lowest peasant girl in the village of Stalbrooke; but, nevertheless, his heart beat more violently, his whole spirit was more eagerly aroused, from a vague and mistaken fancy that it was Edith Forrest who was thus carried away by some means and contrivances, which he had not time to explain even in his own thoughts. He galloped on, then, as if life and death were in the chase, and in three minutes he was by the side of one of the men who were dragging on the poor girl towards a carriage, now visible at some distance beyond.

Without pausing for words, Strafford, as he came up, reined in his horse and grasped the man by the collar. Stiles, for he it was, judging from all he saw that their scheme was frustrated, and that nothing was left but to break away and escape, turned round and aimed a fierce blow at Strafford's head as he bent over him, at the same time freeing himself with a sudden jerk from the young officer's hold. He then darted away, but not before he had received a sharp wound in the shoulder from Strafford's sword.

Soames, the other man, had by this time also let go his hold, and was making the best of his way off; but as he was somewhat heavier and older than the other, he might soon have been overtaken, had not Strafford, recollecting the three others he had seen coming up, turned to protect the girl, whom he had rescued, from them also in case they should be of the same party. The impetus of his horse had carried him a little beyond Lucy Williams; and when he turned, he saw only two of the other men coming up, while Lucy was running forward towards him.

With all the wild eagerness and enthusiasm of her nature, she cast herself upon her knees beside his horse, exclaiming, with wild accents of joy and gratitude, "Oh, thank you, thank you, Master Ralph," as she always called him; "God bless you a thousand and a thousand times."

"Lucy," he exclaimed, "Lucy, is it you? Good God, my poor girl, how has this happened? Do not be alarmed," he continued, raising her up with a hand which she kissed again and again in fervent gratitude. "Do not be alarmed; there are only two of these men. I will protect you! Do not be alarmed: keep close to me, and you are safe."

Almost as he spoke, however, the foremost of those who were coming up exclaimed aloud, "Don't be afraid, Miss Lucy; don't be afraid. We are Master Meakes's men come to help you. He's gone himself to look after the other one that the captain knocked down."

These words, of course, removed all farther apprehension from the mind of Lucy and Ralph Strafford; and, dismounting from his horse, he naturally began to inquire how all this strange affair had happened. But we must not forget to point out that he was totally ignorant of what had taken place between Forrest and Lucy beforehand, Sir Andrew Stalbrooke on every account having carefully abstained from mentioning at the castle his encounter with the young libertine in the cottage of the village schoolmaster. All was now explained to Strafford in brief and broken words; and if the injury to the poor village girl made his bosom burn with indignation, his anger and scorn were even perhaps more powerfully aroused by the offence offered to his uncle. Lucy, it appeared, when attacked by John Forrest, had been on her way to the dwelling of Philippina;

and after giving her every assurance of protection and support, Strafford sent her on thither under charge of one of Meakes's companions, bidding the other follow him in search of Meakes and the offender.

Though gentle and kind, and with many of the early feelings of boyhood fresh about him, Strafford, when fully convinced that a certain course was right, had a degree of stern determination in his character which permitted him not to waver or pause in the execution of a duty; and his resolution was instantly taken to pursue Forrest, and, looking upon him no longer as his uncle's guest, to seize upon him and convey him before a magistrate, as taken in the commission of a grave offence.

He hastened back, therefore, with all speed, to the spot where he had left him; but there was no one there, and the only object to be discerned upon the road was what seemed the form of a man at some distance upon his hands and knees. Strafford instantly turned his steps in that direction: but the procumbent figure proved to be that of honest Timothy Meakes, who took no notice of him, though twice spoken to, but busily pursued the footsteps of John Forrest, distinguishing them from all others by his own peculiar skill in such investigations.

His object seemed to be to trace them to a certain point; for no sooner had he ascertained that they followed a small path to the left, than he started up, exclaiming, "Now, Jim, if you run round by Shooter's lane, I will go down here, and then, if the captain gallops on to the corner of Gray's Pond, we are sure to have him."

Strafford knew Meakes well, and was not ignorant of his talents for the pursuit of any object; he therefore spurred on at once, and in five minutes had reached the corner of a large pond, which, running up to the very banks of some high hedges, prevented any one passing in that direction but by the road. On arriving at that spot, however, he was not a little surprised to see a servant with a led horse; and on nearer approach, recognised one of those who had accompanied Mr. Forrest's carriage to the castle. He heard feet at the same time coming rapidly on the path by which he expected the young lawyer to arrive; and turning his horse that way, he prepared to encounter John Forrest before he could receive the assistance of his servant, in the hope

of detaining him a sufficient length of time to enable Meakes or the other man to come up.

There was one difficulty, however, suggested itself to his mind, which was contained in the question, "Before whom shall I take him!" The nearest magistrate was Sir Andrew Stalbrooke himself; but although Strafford knew that Sir Andrew would execute his duty firmly and vigorously, yet he also knew that it would be painful and terrible to all the courteous feelings of his nature to deal with his guest, and with the nephew of one who was lying ill in his house, as he would do with any other violator of the law. The only other magistrate within a moderate distance was a Mr. Waters, at the small town of Lallington; but before him Strafford had a strong repugnance to bring the prisoner, from a great personal dislike to the man. He had been originally a low attorney in the town, and the vulgar opinion that country attorneys only live and thrive by sowing dissensions among their neighbours, was, in his case at least, justified. By this means he had risen to some degree of opulence; and in the capacity of Lord Mallory's agent he had done all that man could do to cause dissension between that nobleman and Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, on every petty and insignificant cause. The friendship of the two gentlemen, however, the clear understanding of each, and their upright intentions, had prevented the results which might otherwise have taken place. But, as he had grown in wealth, Mr. Waters had grown in insolence; and though Sir Andrew Stalbrooke had contented himself with calmly reproving some parts of his conduct, and had passed over others with silent contempt, Strafford himself had not always borne his flippancy with the same calmness; and the young officer avoided, as far as possible, any communication with him.

There was no time to be lost, however, for he doubted not that Forrest had soon recovered from the blow he had received; and in another instant the young lawyer appeared above the bank. But Strafford, springing to the ground, stopped him, saying, in as calm a tone as he could assume, "A word or two with you, Mr. Forrest, if you please."

"A dozen, sir, if you are alone," answered Forrest, fiercely; "but I do not want to be taken with such unhandsome odds again; so, if you have any words to say, say them; but I think it would be best to betake our-

selves to other things than words, for you have struck me, sir, and I do not forget it. Let us be quick."

"You mistake me, sir," replied Strafford, seeing him lay his hand upon his sword; "I have no inclination on earth to fight you at this moment. The matter is even more serious, Mr. Forrest," he continued, approaching closer to him; "you have been this night engaged in a flagrant offence against the laws and peace of the realm, and I apprehend you for that cause, charging you in the king's name to come before a magistrate."

As he spoke he seized Forrest by the collar; but it unfortunately happened that the bridle of his horse being over his arm, the animal, instead of following his master's quick movement to seize John Forrest, drew back, frightened by Strafford's gesture. Forrest, at the same time struggling in his grasp, freed himself and drew his sword, exclaiming, "Sir, you are a cowardly trickster, and no gentleman!" and at the same time he struck him a blow with the back of his hand, and brought the point of his weapon close to the other's breast.

Strafford cast off the bridle, drew his sword, crossed it with that of Forrest, and in three passes the blade went through the body of the young lawyer, entering below the right arm and coming out under the left shoulder. The servant, seeing the contention, was riding up, but too late to prevent the catastrophe. When he arrived, his master lay still and motionless upon the earth, and he exclaimed aloud, addressing Strafford, "You have killed him! you have murdered him!"

"You must have seen," replied Strafford, sternly but calmly, "you must have seen that he drew his sword upon me, and drew upon his own head the fate that has befallen him."

"I saw nothing, I see nothing," cried the servant, loudly and insolently, "but that you came to seek him, and that you have killed him."

"Silence, sir," cried Strafford, in a tone of authority; "dismount instantly from your horse, and assist me to ascertain whether your master be dead or only fainting."

The man obeyed at once, but with dogged sullenness: and bending over the body in the clear moonlight, Strafford endeavoured to ascertain whether or not life were really extinct. There was no animation in the

face, however; the eyes were closed, the lips were still. No breath dilated the nostrils; no movement indicated life. The young officer put his hand upon the heart; the warmth of active being was there, but there was no pulsation. Untying his cravat, Strafford bound it round Forrest's body, endeavouring as far as possible to stop the effusion of blood; and then looked around him in the expectation of seeing Meakes and his companions, or of hearing something that might indicate their approach. All was silent, however; and after pausing for a minute or two, he said to the servant,

"At all events, we must carry your master to some cottage. Run down the lane to the labourer's huts, and bring up assistance."

The man obeyed in the same sullen silence, and Strafford remained beside the dead body. His feelings at that moment were very awful, as there—without one generous emotion of the heart seared by crime, or vice, or selfishness, with all the fresh charities of an amiable disposition, warm and unblighted within him—he stood and gazed upon the cold, stonelike object he had made, while the calm light of the moon shone upon the still motionless features and spiritless form of the dead man. He felt the awfulness of taking life; he felt how dark and terrible a thing it is to put out that flame we never can light again; to place between the sins of the past and the judgment of the future the marble barrier of death, which closes up the way to repentance, to atonement, to well-doing. He felt strongly, deeply, painfully, that it is only the hand of all-seeing wisdom and almighty power that should ever drop that barrier on the career of a mortal being; that for man, idle, vain, short-sighted as he is, to take the fulfilment of God's vengeance in his own hands, and rend asunder soul and body, is a sin dreadful, irreparable, and presumptuous.

It is true that in his own case he had slain his adversary in self-defence, and he felt and knew that, if ever taking life was justified, it was so in the present instance: he felt that he had had no choice; that what he had done had been forced upon him; and yet he mourned with deep, heartfelt sorrow; with a gloom which, at the time, seemed as if it had settled upon his heart for ever; he mourned that such a lot should have fallen to him.

For the first time in his life Ralph Strafford felt uneasy at being alone with his own thoughts; he longed for the servant's return; he looked around anxiously for the coming of Meakes and his companions. But they did not appear, and the only sound he heard was the rolling away of carriage-wheels, probably those of the vehicle which young Forrest had brought, and some voices speaking in loud tones, but apparently at a great distance. The absence of the servant seemed interminable, although it was, in fact, protracted no longer than was absolutely necessary to gather together some men from among the labourers' cottages, and guide them back to the spot.

As soon as they arrived, the body of Forrest was lifted and carried down to the first cottage, where it was laid upon a bed, and a number of people collected round it, gazing in silence and awe on the spectacle before them. Ralph Strafford gazed too, and would have given many a year from his own life to recall the spirit once more to the frail tenement of clay. The features of the dead man were calm and serene, however. It seemed as if the parting pang of death had carried away the bad passions which had once stamped themselves on that countenance, and left them, together with the dark and turbulent struggle over for ever, in the cold tranquillity of everlasting repose.

Notwithstanding the terrible nature of the wound which had caused his death, but little blood had flowed externally; and with the lingering hope that would fain remain unconvinced of a terrible reality, Strafford once again put his hand upon the dead man's heart; but the warm, throbbing blood of life beat not under his touch; the extremities were already beginning to grow cold, and a rigidity of the features and the hands spoke too plainly that all was over. After gazing for some minutes and giving directions in regard to the body, Strafford turned away for the purpose of seeking his own home. He told one of the labourers to see if he could find out Meakes, and bid him be early at the castle tomorrow morning, and then looked round for young Forrest's servant, with the purpose of bidding him not to bear rashly any tidings to the family, but to suffer the news of the misfortune which had occurred to be communicated by Sir Andrew Stalbrooke or himself.

To his surprise, however, he found that the servant

had left the cottage without his perceiving it; and fearing lest he should have gone up to the castle to tell the tale at once, Strafford remounted his horse, which was held at the door of the cottage, and rode quickly on towards his house. As he went, the circumstances that had occurred repassed in rapid succession through his mind, and brought with them many a painful feeling and many a dark apprehension. What would be the conduct of Mr. Forrest? he asked himself. What would be the conduct of Edith? Would she ever consent to give her hand to a man who had thus slain her near relation? Would Mr. Forrest ever consent to her union with one who had killed a person, however unworthy, that was so deeply rooted in his affection?

In regard to Edith, indeed, his apprehensions were not so strong; he felt, perhaps, more fully at that moment than he had ever done before, and therein he experienced a bright consolation, that the love which Edith Forrest entertained for him was not the love of an ordinary mind and heart; that it was deep, strong, powerful, able to conquer and to trample upon the cold rules and lawyer-like definitions of a calculating and feelingless world. He felt, that—though she might regret as deeply as himself that the act had been committed—she could not, because her cousin's blood was upon his hand, visit upon his head, by the terrible loss of her affection and breach of her promises, those consequences which had been produced by the crimes and errors of the very man who had fallen.

He felt that her mind was too just and noble to let her do so; he hoped and he believed that her love was too intense, too ardent, too sincere, to suffer her heart to yield, even if her reason had opposed its dictates; but, at the same time, he feared what might be the conduct of Mr. Forrest. He almost trembled to think what the conduct of Edith would be, if the terrible barrier of a father's curse were added to the obstacle placed between them by her cousin's blood. He was in no mood for viewing anything cheerfully; and he longed for some time for thought before he was forced to communicate to Edith or her family the events of that miserable night.

Thus, then, when—after dismounting from his horse and washing some blood from his hands, which had fallen upon them while binding the handkerchief round

the dead man—he entered the drawing-room, where he had found Sir Andrew and Edith seated at tea the night before, he was not a little pleased to find Sir Andrew alone.

To his uncle it was not only necessary that he should now communicate all that had just taken place, but also that he should make him acquainted with the situation in which he stood with regard to Edith, and seek his advice, assistance, and support. So much, indeed, had he to say, that it was difficult to know where to begin his tale. But Sir Andrew himself afforded him time by instantly beginning to speak upon another subject.

"My dear Ralph," he said, as soon as his nephew entered the room, "you have been absent long, and I wish much to speak with you. Hear me out, my dear nephew, without interrupting me," he continued, with a kind and affectionate smile. "Do not suppose for one moment, that, at your period of life, and with your conduct in every respect vouched by the most noble and upright course of life that ever young man pursued, I doubt in any degree that your whole behaviour is such as I can be proud of, or that I am going to question your demeanour, or ask any explanation of your acts. Surely, Ralph, if noble and perfect confidence did not exist between you and me, it were impossible for it to exist between any two men on earth."

Ralph stretched out his hand and grasped that of his uncle affectionately; but Sir Andrew, without giving him time to make any reply, went on. "You will take my little lecture, then, Ralph, in good part, I know, for I am only communicating to you what thirty years more acquaintance with the world than you possess has taught me; and I leave to your own strong mind, good heart, and high sense of honour to apply it as you may find fit and reasonable. For these two days running, Ralph, you have spent almost all your evening at Lady Mallory's, and yet you seem to be extremely fond of the society of the sweet girl who is here, and who was telling me this very evening of how kindly, and nobly, and courteously you behaved to her and her mother in Germany."

"I can assure you, my dear sir," said Ralph; but Sir Andrew again gently waved his hand with a smile, saying, "Nay, hear me out, dear nephew. I am not blaming you; but I would have you remember that, though dear

Lady Mallory may be a year or two older than yourself, and though you may have been accustomed for years to treat her almost as an elder sister, yet she is still most beautiful, young, and deeply interesting; and, what is still more to her purpose, Ralph, she is evidently of an affectionate, warm, and sensible heart. Now, Ralph, in the good world in which we live, I am sorry to say that men, who consider themselves persons of high honour, seem to place their dealings with women beyond that code of laws by which they regulate their dealings with other men. The man who would think himself disgraced, and would be so in his own eyes for ever if he were to tell a lie, to break a promise or a vow, to cheat or to deceive in the most trifling particular, to mislead by any false showing whatsoever *another man*, scruples not but too often to mislead, to deceive, to break his promise, to violate his oath to a woman, to cheat her out of that which is her noblest possession, peace of mind and tranquillity of heart, to trifle with her affections, to insult, to dishonour, and to betray. Even after he has done so, he is received in society, courted, flattered, liked; and the acts which should stamp him with eternal infamy are regarded almost in the same class with some gallant feats performed in the chase; some act of skilful policy or manly daring. There are some, however, who differ from this creed and who abhor such conduct; I own myself one, Ralph. I look upon it that the man who behaves ill to a woman, and yet would not do so to a man, only shows himself to be at heart a coward; for the only cause which enables, permits, or justifies any such act, is that woman cannot protect or avenge herself. She is trusted, Ralph, by God and by her weakness, to man's honour; and, therefore, if we prize our honour, if we hold it really dear as a true and veritable principle for the guidance of our conduct, and not merely as a fantastic and relative notion, to be framed upon the opinions of others, we should be far more scrupulous, delicate, thoughtful, in all our acts and feelings towards women than even towards men. We know that every gentleman has his sword by his side to redress himself if we do him a wrong; but we know that woman has no redress but silence, sorrow, and endurance. Do not look grieved, my dear Ralph, for Heaven forbid that I should ever insinuate such a charge against you, that you could know-

ingly behave ill, or would ever break a vow, or willingly fail in any promise to a woman! I know you too well, Ralph—your mother was my sister—it is impossible! But sometimes men of the very best principles and inclinations do not consider sufficiently that the structure of a woman's heart and feelings is as fine, as delicate, as easily affected and injured as her corporeal frame. We may unintentionally raise thoughts and expectations which may be disappointed. For the gratification of a few hours in pleasant society, we may teach a woman to believe that we seek to make that society our own for ever. From that belief may grow up feelings deeper, stronger, more enduring; and then, when disappointment comes, sorrow takes possession of the heart where joy once dwelt; shame at having aided to deceive itself gives an additional pang to the agony of being deceived; and an age of regret, and mortification, and cold chagrin very often succeeds from such causes, and such causes alone, to a youth of joy and thoughtless happiness. Many a man, Ralph, has, I firmly believe, killed an amiable and kind-hearted woman; or, if not, has killed her happiness, which is worse, without breaking one vow, without failing in one promise, except those vague and worthless promises conveyed by the manner, and the tone, and the demeanour, which often win more upon woman than all the vows that ever were breathed at the feet of beauty. Many a boy, Ralph, that would not kill a butterfly, destroys the painted insect while catching it merely to admire its beauty; and I think, Ralph, that we should not only be as careful and as tenderly thoughtful in our general demeanour towards women, as we are in our vows, our promises, and our actions towards men; but far more so, inasmuch as, by the contrary, we risk more terrible injury to a more delicate being, and may injure our own honour by doing wrong to those who cannot right themselves."

The old man spoke with mild and placid dignity; but still in his calm eye there was a look of mild and affectionate love towards his nephew, which left no earthly doubt of his confidence in him; nor was there the slightest touch of pride, or of that vanity and conceit in his own opinions, which would curdle the best cup of morality that ever was offered to the lips of man. It was evident that what he said was said from regard and

affection towards him to whom he addressed it; and Ralph listened to it in the same spirit, though his mind, a little eager, was naturally more impatient under the circumstances in which he was then placed.

"I thank you a thousand times, my dear uncle," he said, as soon as Sir Andrew had finished. "I am indebted to you and to your instructions for everything that is good in my conduct and disposition, and I should be most ungrateful if I did not thank you for every new lesson that may improve and direct me. I do not fancy that you are blaming me either; but let me say a few words to put your mind at rest on one subject before I proceed to tell you some events which have just occurred, in regard to which you may blame me perhaps, and which, I fear, may pain and agitate you."

Strafford paused for a moment, but Sir Andrew saw that he had not concluded, and he was one of those men who would always hear to an end, unless he saw that another required a little assistance with his story.

"In regard to my two visits to Lady Mallory, my dear sir," continued Ralph, "my visit to-night was not a very long one; and during the last two hours I have gone through various other scenes and adventures. But, besides that, let me tell you that my whole conversation with Lady Mallory, or, at least, the greater portion of it, has been upon a subject on which I must soon speak more fully to you—I mean my love for Edith Forrest; so that there can be no danger of Lady Mallory misunderstanding in any degree the object of my visits to the Hall."

The fine countenance of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke was lighted up with a well-pleased smile. "I am delighted," he said, "I am delighted. I have never yet seen any one, my dear Ralph, whom I think so fitted to make you happy as that sweet girl. There is something in her very look that makes my heart warm towards her; and when one speaks to her, her answer to every sentence seems painted in the varying expression of her countenance before she answers any. Her face always puts me in mind of one of those bright lakes in Cumberland, where every rosy cloud and every varying hue upon the evening sky is reflected, and yet softened and mingled, as it were, by a light ripple, with the colours of the lake itself. But you look grieved and sad, Ralph, even at my commendation of her you love."

"Because, my dear sir," replied Strafford, "circumstances may prevent her from ever being mine. But now, my dear sir, give ear to me for a moment, for matters of deep importance have occurred in which I have been a pained and unwilling actor. First, however, let me tell you the circumstances in which I stand towards Edith and Mr. Forrest!" and he recapitulated to Sir Andrew all that the reader has already been made acquainted with on that subject.

"Unfortunate indeed, Strafford," replied his uncle; "it is evidently utterly impossible that Edith should ever have loved that wretched and conceited young libertine, even if she did not love you. Mr. Forrest, however, for whose own personal character I cannot entertain that opinion I should wish, is evidently very much attached to him, and I fear we shall have great difficulty in obtaining his consent. But I have discovered one thing, Ralph, since Mr. Forrest has been here, by his observations upon pictures and other matters of the kind. He is, both by nature and by theory, one of a school which is rapidly springing up, of gold worshippers; one of those who regard everything upon earth chiefly, if not solely, in its relation to money. Now by making such an addition to your inheritance as to render you an infinitely better match for his daughter than his nephew can be, perhaps we may do something with Mr. Forrest."

"Alas, I fear not, sir," replied Ralph, "for the other circumstances which I have now to relate have added a new and terrible obstacle. As I was riding round the corner of the park from Lady Mallory's, intending to come in by the west gate, of which I happened to have the key, I heard some loud screams, and, riding on, found a poor girl struggling with three men, who were carrying her towards a carriage. One of these men proved to be John Forrest, and the girl—"

"Lucy Williams, on my life," cried Sir Andrew, unable to restrain himself, while his high forehead turned as red as fire.

"The same, my dear uncle," replied Strafford. "However, Forrest turned upon me while the others hurried on. He caught hold of the bridle of my horse, and endeavoured to prevent me from interfering, at length drawing his sword, and vowing he would kill my horse. On this I knocked him down with the hilt of

my sword, and galloped on after the two men, who, finding that they could not effect their purpose, scampered off across the common, leaving poor Lucy at liberty. By this time I saw two more men coming up, and had indeed seen a third; but it turned out that Lucy's uncle, Meakes, whom you know, had received a hint of Forrest's intentions towards his niece, and was coming, with two other men, to her rescue when I arrived. Forrest, by this time, had got up and gone away from the spot where I knocked him down; but as this gross offence, together with what I then understood he had before done in regard to this very poor girl, was not to be passed over, I determined at once to pursue him and carry him before Waters at Lallington, that he might be committed and punished. For this purpose, while one of the men took care of Lucy to Philippina's, I, Meakes, and the other man, spread out over the common; and coming up to a place where his servant was holding a horse for him, I encountered the unfortunate man close by Gray's Pond. I then told him what was my object, and endeavoured to arrest him; but he instantly demanded satisfaction on the spot for the blow I had struck him, and drew his sword upon me. When he found I was not inclined to fight, he struck me, with words of insult and contumely. I could bear no more, but drew my sword. If it had been daylight, I would only have wounded him; but, in trying to do so on the uneven ground, my foot slipped a little, and I ran him through the body."

Sir Andrew Stalbrooke put his hand before his eyes. "My dear uncle," exclaimed Strafford, "have I been in fault? As a man, a gentleman, and a soldier, could I have done otherwise than I have done?"

"No, Ralph, no," replied his uncle. "I grieve for you, but I cannot blame you. Had I been in your place, I must have done the same. But this is a terrible occurrence: what has been done with the unfortunate man?"

"I sent his servant, who had witnessed the whole," replied Strafford, "to seek some of the labourers, and we carried him down to the cottages."

"Was there no life in him?" demanded Sir Andrew.

"Alas! no," answered Strafford; "he was quite dead; nor did he ever speak a word after he received his wound."

"We must take care," said Sir Andrew, rising im-

mediately and approaching the hall, "we must take care that this servant does not carry the tidings to the family before they are properly prepared."

"I have already given orders about that," replied Strafford; "for the servant left the cottage before I did; and thinking that most likely he had come on here, I rode as fast as possible. On arriving, I found that he had not made his appearance, nor, indeed, had he been here since he left the house with young Forrest, who, instead of going to London as he pretended, went over, it seems, to Lallington, and there concocted his infamous design towards poor Lucy Williams. I have given strict orders that, if he comes, he is to be brought to you without being permitted to speak with any of the other persons of Forrest's family."

"You were right, you were right, my dear Ralph," said his uncle. "Always have forethought for other people's feelings or happiness. I fear no great evil effect from this news upon Mrs. Forrest, but I must take upon myself the task of breaking it both to her and to her husband; and I feel that to him the blow will be terrible."

"I would fain, my dear uncle," said Ralph, "tell my own story to Edith, melancholy as it may be, and I would willingly tell it as soon as possible."

"You cannot do so to-night, my dear boy," replied his uncle; "and, to say the truth, I am not sorry for it. Mr. Forrest insisted upon being left quite alone; the surgeon said he did not apprehend any danger from such being the case; and Mrs. Forrest and Edith retired to rest about half an hour ago, wondering perhaps a little that you had not returned. But this little delay, Strafford, will give you time to think over all that you have to say and do. This unfortunate business must, of course, involve many other painful particulars, and I think it best, on every account, that you should inform Edith with your own lips. You can then ascertain from her how this event will affect you with regard to her. After you have told her, Ralph, I think it will be better for you, under every point of view, to leave this place and go to London for a few days. In the first place, it would be terrible for Mr. Forrest to remain for any length of time—even for a day, most likely—in the same house with a man who has killed his brother's son; and, in the next place, I think we are bound, under such circumstances, to give way to his feelings, and

not to take any farther steps in pursuing your claim to the hand of his daughter till he has somewhat recovered himself, and till reason and reflection have cooled down one passion, and enabled, what I am convinced is the dominant one, that is to say, love of money, to reassert its power. At all events, it seems to me that simple decency requires that you should pause for the time, and courtesy that you should leave the house where the relations of your unfortunate antagonist are forced for a time to reside."

However painful for Strafford to leave Edith under such circumstances, he perfectly coincided in the views of his uncle; and after a long conversation, which carried them on nearly to the first hour after midnight, it was determined that his uncle's postchaise should be ready at an early hour of the next morning to carry him to London, and that, as soon as he had an interview with Edith, he should take his departure from Stalbrooke Castle. Sir Andrew then retired to rest, and Strafford sought his chamber; but there, manifold dark and painful emotions, which he had controlled in presence of his uncle, took possession of him entirely, and a night of feverish restlessness ended a day checkered by such anxieties and griefs.

CHAPTER XV.

The morning that followed was dull and gloomy; the prospect on every side was circumscribed by dim gray mist, mingled with falling rain; the air was heavy and oppressive; the aspect of the earth wet and uncomfortable: when the deer moved before your eyes, you seemed to hear their feet beating the plashy ground; and the farther trees of the park were scarcely visible from the windows of the house. Strange, however, to say, as Strafford gazed from the window, prepared to set out upon his journey, he would not have wished the aspect of the day other than it was. Had it been bright and cheerful, it would have formed a strange and painful contrast with the feelings of his heart.

He had one other task to perform, that of bidding adieu to Edith; but though he hung about the library and the

picture gallery, and in the neighbourhood of Mr. Forrest's chamber, to the anteroom of which she was most likely to pay her first visit, Edith did not appear. He at length determined to ask for an interview as soon as possible. Edith's own maid he did not choose to trust; for he was convinced—though, perhaps, without any more reasonable motive than the shrewd inquiring eyes of the girl herself—that she acted in some degree as a spy upon her mistress. Seeing Mrs. Forrest's maid, however, passing up the stairs, whom he had known and thought well of in Germany, he called her to him, and begged she would deliver a note to Miss Forrest, as he was obliged suddenly to go to London, and wished to speak with her before he went. The maid willingly undertook the task; and writing down in a few words a request to speak with her immediately, Strafford entered the library and waited with anxious impatience for some reply to his note.

It was one of those periods at which minutes seem hours; but even Strafford could not fancy it long, ere a light step on the stairs showed him that Edith had instantly obeyed his summons, and the next moment she was in the room. He shut the door carefully, and then threw his arms around her. Edith was startled; but she was one of those who affected nothing, and she attempted not to withdraw from his embrace.

"What is the matter, dear Strafford?" she said; "you look haggard and wretched, and my mother's woman told me that you were about to go to London."

"That I am about to leave you, dear Edith," replied Strafford, "is indeed true; and in another minute or two you will answer me whether it is to be for ever."

"I will answer you at once, Ralph," she said, eagerly; "it is not to be for ever. Whatever has occurred, whatever may have passed, so far as my will has power, it is not for ever, Ralph Strafford. I never make promises without a full resolution to keep them to the letter; and I have forgotten none of those which are yet but forty-eight hours old."

"Thanks, dearest, thanks," replied Strafford, pressing her closer to his bosom; "I will not offer to give you back those promises, unless you demand that I should. But yet you must hear me, dear Edith, for we are both placed in terrible circumstances, and you must decide our fate."

Edith gazed upon him in alarm; but there was a deep,

appealing tenderness in that pure blue eye, which told him that the heart was all-powerful on his side, and he went on anxiously, but not fearfully, in his painful task.

"Edith," he said, "suppose that such a thing were realized in our case as that which our great and miraculous poet has depicted in his first scenes of the 'Lovers of Verona:' suppose this hand, which now clasps yours with the unalterable affection of strong, devoted love, had been raised last night against one of your near kinred—and—and—"

"Merciful Heaven!" cried Edith, clasping her hands. "Oh, Ralph, do I understand you right?"

He gazed upon her face in solemn, painful silence.

"But not for me! Not on my account! Not about me, Ralph!" she cried. "Oh, tell me, tell me, that it was not for me."

"No, dear Edith! no!" replied Strafford, "most solemnly it was not! But does that make any difference?"

"All! all!" exclaimed Edith; "all, Strafford! Had you fought, and had he fallen in a quarrel about me, I should have hated myself for giving cause to such a thing, and I should have blamed you, Strafford, for doing even a deed that men think pardonable in a matter where your own private passions and affections were concerned. But now that you tell me it was not about me, I, knowing you and knowing him, feel as certain as that I live that some great and noble, some just and honourable cause, drew your sword unwillingly from the sheath. Is it not so? Is it not so, Ralph Strafford?" she continued.

For a moment Strafford could not reply, for tears drowned utterance. He who had never wept since the days of infancy; he who had not once wept through that anxious and terrible night, was overcome by the tender words of confidence and love, and wept right bitterly.

"I will tell you all, dear Edith," he replied, at length; "I will tell you everything, and then you shall judge."

He told her all that he knew of the conduct of John Forrest towards poor Lucy Williams. That conduct and the purposes which Forrest entertained might perhaps have made the cheek of Ralph Strafford burn to tell to the pure, bright, innocent girl that stood beside him at any other moment, and Edith herself might have blushed to hear the tale of vice and folly; but the deeper,

the more intense feelings that were now at the hearts of both, the awful event that had occurred, the desolation of many of their bright hopes, the gloom that was cast over the future prospect, overcame the lighter thoughts, and closed up the source of the ingenuous blush of shame, as the dark cloud of the tempest overshadows the warm roses of the dawn.

When he had done, when he had told her all, exactly, truly, minutely, adding nothing in his own defence, aggravating nothing on the part of his opponent, leaving out, perhaps, some things which might have tended still further to his own justification, Strafford paused for a reply; but Edith for a moment hid her eyes upon his bosom, scared by the image of death which his last words presented.

"Have I then, Edith," he said, "have I done wrong? Have I, have I lost your affection? Do you ask back your promises to me?"

"No! no! no! dear Strafford," she replied; "you have acted as I thought you would act. It is terrible, indeed, that this should have occurred; terrible that you should have shed, even in defence of innocence and wronged virtue, the blood of one so nearly akin to me. But because he brought his death upon his own head, from your hand, by his own baseness, surely that should be no reason that I should feel towards you, who are acting nobly and well, differently from what I before felt, or act differently than I would otherwise have acted. No! Strafford! no! I ask back no promise! I renew all those promises; and though you have, from his own fault, killed my cousin, I repeat again, that, sooner or later, my hand shall be yours if you continue to wish it."

Strafford clasped her to his heart and thanked her eagerly and repeatedly, but Edith went on. "Of course, Strafford," she said, "this terrible occurrence will make a painful, and, I fear, almost insurmountable addition to my father's objections; and indeed, Strafford, we must yield a good deal to his natural feelings upon this occasion. As I told you before, he always seemed to love John Forrest better than myself; and, of course, we must, for a time, refrain even from suggesting to his mind the idea of my uniting myself to one through whom he lost his favourite. I have always had a conviction on my mind for several years, and I still feel

certain that it will be so, that the time will come when my father's dislike to my mother and myself will assume even a bitterer and more decided form; when, in short, as I once heard him threaten to do, he will cast us both off, to live upon what he calls the pittance which she brought him in marriage. I will not say absolutely, Strafford, that we must wait till then; but I may say that, if that occurs, or when it occurs, for I am more than ever convinced that it will, I shall hold myself free to act as I please."

"But what, dear Edith," demanded Strafford, "but what has impressed this idea upon your mind more strongly now? In all probability, the very fact of having lost your cousin will make Mr. Forrest cling to you."

"Oh no! oh no!" replied Edith; "he knows too well, Strafford, that I love you, and that alone would make him hate me; but I think so more than ever since he has been ill. I fancied that tenderness, care, affection, might in some degree move him, and I did all that I could to win his love; but when I sat by him and offered him anything from my hand, he took it with an averted head and a sort of shudder, as if I were some being that he hated giving him a cup of poison. It was the same with my mother; and at length he made us both quit him, saying that the very sight of me conjured up phantoms that disturbed his repose."

Strafford looked down thoughtfully, and then gazed with tender affection for a moment upon Edith, feeling that anything offered to him by that dear and beautiful being, if the cup were sweet, would be doubly grateful, and if it were gall itself, would lose one half its bitterness.

Time was wearing, however; there was much more to be spoken of between them; and, lest any means should be taken to stop their holding private communication with each other, as well as not to hurt the feelings of Mr. Forrest by any open correspondence between them, Strafford proposed that all their communications should pass through Lady Mallory, to whom, he said, he would write upon the subject. A faint smile came upon Edith's lip as she listened.

"Do you know, Strafford," she said, "that I was a little unjust to you last night, and half inclined to be jealous of Lady Mallory? Not knowing all the sad causes that detained you away from me, I thought you

stayed very long with her, and left Edith very long alone."

"I have known her from my boyhood, Edith," replied Ralph, "and indeed, sweet one, our conversation could not have given you pain, for it was all about my love for you, and the means of winning your father's consent to our union."

"She is very beautiful!" said Edith, thoughtfully; but she then changed the conversation, and asked what were Strafford's immediate plans. While he was busily telling her, the door opened, and Sir Andrew Stalbrooke joined them. It was evident that he, too, had passed an uneasy night. The hue of florid health upon his cheek was somewhat paler, and his bright eye dimmer, than usual. On entering the room he advanced straight to Edith, and, perhaps somewhat to her surprise, took her in his arms and affectionately kissed her cheek.

"My sweet young lady," he said, "my poor nephew, in recounting to me the very painful occurrence which has taken place, informed me of the fact that he had some time ago become deeply attached to you, and was not without some hope that his attachment might meet with a return. From what I see, I judge that he is as happy in your good esteem as I could wish him to be; and I can only say for my own part, that, loving him as I do, the choice he has made gives me the deepest pleasure; and his having won your regard makes me the more proud of him."

Edith blushed deeply; but there was pleasure as well as embarrassment in the expression of her countenance; pleasure indeed bore the greater share, till Sir Andrew went on.

"Though I am sure," he said, "my dear young lady, that the conduct of my nephew in the unfortunate circumstances in which he has been placed, will neither alter your affection for him nor your conduct towards him, yet it must necessarily, I fear, separate you for a time, as of course Strafford cannot remain at present in the same house with your father, under such painful circumstances. During his absence I trust to be able to make Mr. Forrest take a kind and reasonable view of the event; but at present, dear lady, I think it would be very much better for Strafford to go immediately, though parting is very painful to those that love. I have known well in my life," he added, with a sigh, "I

have known well how painful parting is, especially when the period of reunion is uncertain. But what makes me urge it at the present moment is, that your father, I find, is awake; the news of this sad event must be conveyed to him by myself immediately, lest it should reach his ears by some less considerate voice. I should wish, however, to tell him, at the time that I make this communication, that my nephew is no longer in the house. The carriage is prepared, Strafford, and all is ready. You will forgive me, dear Edith," he continued, "I know you will forgive me for cutting short, even by a few minutes, the painful pleasure of parting;" and, thus saying, he pressed her hand gently in his own, and left her with Strafford.

One long, sorrowful embrace, one ardent, parting kiss, and Strafford left her. The door closed, and Edith melted into tears.

He was still in the house, however; he was still near her; and she listened for another sound, which was to announce that their separation was complete. In a minute or two she heard the rolling sound of wheels passing along the stone courts at the back of the castle; and in another minute more, watching with eager eyes the only spot where the windows afforded a view of even a part of the road, she saw a carriage rolling rapidly away, and felt that she was alone, alone, with everything in dark uncertainty around her; not knowing what might be the event of the next hour; with scarce even the slightest clew to guide her towards a knowledge of her future fate; without any means of judging how, or when, or where, she should see again the beloved being from whom she had just parted, whose presence had but been given to her for a few days, like a gleam of summer glory in a wintry day, to be snatched from her again immediately, and leave the world around darker and more dreary than before.

CHAPTER XVI.

Sir Andrew Stalbrooke was a man who had never, through life, suffered any of his griefs or sorrows—they had not been many, but they had been severe—to prevent him, even for a moment, from acting boldly, straightforwardly, and decidedly, in the course which a clear judgment and a kind and tender heart dictated. His feelings, indeed, were deep, strong, permanent; his sorrows affected him more than similar sensations would have done other men. They affected him longer, too, as all sorrows do fine minds.

Things chiselled in soft stone wear out easily, and may be replaced by others. That which is engraved upon a gem lasts till the gem is destroyed. But griefs with him affected not the corporeal frame, or the reasoning and active mind; that part of our mixed being, which seems calculated for mingling with, and acting upon, the things of earth, passed free. It was upon the spirit, the feeling, the ethereal soul, that the sorrows which he endured worked almost entirely.

The situation of his nephew, and the events which had occurred, gave Sir Andrew Stalbrooke the deepest possible pain; but he was prepared to act, in consequence of all that had taken place, as if the pain were solely on the part of those who had sustained the loss. He thought for Mr. Forrest, he grieved for him, he sought anxiously to diminish, if possible, the pang that he was to receive, even if it could be diminished in the very slightest degree. All his feelings, as we have before pointed out, had more or less some reference to the well-being and happiness of others; and during the night that had passed, several of his hours had been given to the thoughts of Edith and Strafford, and of the unfortunate man who—ill and severely wounded himself, and without those fixed principles, those bright hopes, or that calm magnanimity of disposition which must contribute, in their different degrees, to blunt the arrows of misfortune and circumscribe the tyrannous power of circumstances—was doomed to receive, on

the bed of sickness, tidings of the death of him whom he seemed to love best on earth.

As soon, then, as he had seen Strafford depart, Sir Andrew sent in a servant to Mr. Forrest's room to ask permission to visit him for a few moments. It was granted at once, though the very demand made Mr. Forrest uneasy. His uneasiness, indeed, proceeded not from any apprehension of an event such as had occurred, but from causes totally different.

But, besides any such accidental feeling of uneasiness, it must be owned that Mr. Forrest personally disliked Sir Andrew Stalbrooke. The perfect high-toned courtesy of his manner, the benevolent gentleness of every word, the calm and dignified forbearance of all his expressions, even when he felt it necessary to rebuke, was a constant source of irritation, and in fact of reproof, to the cynical, sneering, discourteous nature of his guest. Even the fresh, clean neatness and care of the baronet's dress, was offensive in the eyes of one who mistook that narrowness of mind, which cannot embrace the minute decencies and elegances, as well as the greater concerns of life, for a sign of vigour and greatness of intellect.

Thus, when Sir Andrew entered his chamber on the morning that we speak of, the eye of the sick man rested upon him with a sneering, bitter expression, and he internally termed the neatness of Sir Andrew's appearance foppery, unworthy of his age, and the courtly grace of his movements, though perfectly natural and unaffected, "minuet airs."

Sir Andrew knew little, and, indeed, cared not at all, what Mr. Forrest thought upon such subjects. His whole soul and mind was at that moment bent upon sparing him any pain that could be avoided. He sat down by his bedside, then, and expressed a hope that he was continuing better in health.

"Somewhat, somewhat," replied Mr. Forrest.—"Somewhat, I thank you, Sir Andrew. I have had less fever, upon the whole, last night, and my morning's sleep, as usual, has refreshed me a good deal."

"Thank God, at least, for that," replied Sir Andrew, in a serious tone, and was about to go on, but Mr. Forrest interrupted him, exclaiming, in a peevish tone, "I don't see why I am to thank God for it at all. If I am to believe he sends the sleep, I am also to believe that he

sent the beast that hurt me, and the one may at least balance the other, so that the score of gratitude is clear."

Sir Andrew gazed at him rather sternly, but it passed away in a moment, and he replied in a mild tone, "I fear, Mr. Forrest, these are subjects on which we should never agree; but I should suppose that you are a man who could enter into the idea very well of a parent punishing a child for its own good, and—especially if that parent be an all-wise and all-seeing one, like our Heavenly Father—mingling mercy with punishment, so as to enable us to bear his chastisement, even while he continues and repeats the infliction for the purpose of guiding us to amendment."

"I think that is all very good," replied Mr. Forrest, "when applied to an unreasoning child; but when talked about in regard to religion, I think it all—all—"

"Cant, you would say," added Sir Andrew Stalbrooke. "It does not at all offend me, Mr. Forrest. The word has been applied to the thoughts and language of so many wiser and better men than myself, that it gives me no pain to hear it used for anything that I can say. But I am far from agreeing with you, that such punishments are only useful to an unreasoning child. On the contrary, I think that if the punishment is just and right, the more clear and powerful is our intellect, the more distinctly shall we see its propriety, the more patiently shall we endure it, the more strenuously shall we attempt to amend. If there were a man that could lay his hand upon his heart and say, 'I have done no evil,' he might impugn the conduct of the Almighty in punishing him. But to those I must hold, who have ever done wrong or thought amiss, the inflictions which God sends should be received with humility, if not with gratitude, as the corrections of one who punishes but to amend. We should bear them with calmness, and, if we have real strength of mind, it should be displayed in conquering, by faith and trust, the natural abhorrence of our mortal frame to pain and sorrow."

"And pray, my dear sir," demanded Mr. Forrest, with a sneering smile, "what is the object of the present homily? Shakspeare says, 'I never yet did hear that the bruised heart was pierced through the ear;' and I never yet did hear that a mangled shoulder was plastered by good doctrine."

"It was not alone, Mr. Forrest," replied Sir Andrew, "of your late unfortunate accident I spoke, but I certainly did hope that you would bear with firmness of mind, and, perhaps, ultimately receive benefit both from this misfortune itself, and from another infliction which I am sorry to say has befallen you."

The countenance of Mr. Forrest changed in a moment. "You have some bad news for me," he exclaimed, with a face of agitation and alarm, strangely contrasted with his former cool and sneering aspect. "What is it, sir? The India property?"

"Alas! my good sir," replied Sir Andrew, "it is not anything affecting your property that you have to deplore. Yet be not alarmed. Your daughter is well and your wife—"

"Pshaw," said Mr. Forrest.

"But your nephew, I regret to say—" continued Sir Andrew.

The sick man started up in bed. "What of him? what of John? He has fallen from his horse? he has broken his leg?"

"Worse, I am sorry to say, worse," replied Sir Andrew Stalbrooke. "Be composed, my dear sir, and oh! seek consolation where it may be found."

Forrest put his hand before his eyes, and his countenance, which was pale before by the effect of his wounds, became absolutely livid. Sir Andrew Stalbrooke watched every change of his countenance, and fearing for the effect which grief might produce, hastened to counteract it by another emotion, for he well knew that rage and indignation would take possession of Mr. Forrest's breast the moment that he became aware that his nephew had fallen by any human hand.

"It grieves me," he said, more rapidly than he had before been speaking, "it grieves me to add, Mr. Forrest, that your nephew has fallen in combat with another gentleman."

He perceived at once that the effect was such as he intended. The sick man drew away his hand, rage flashed from his eyes, and, clinching both his fists together, he exclaimed, "He has been murdered! he has been murdered! and I will pursue his murderer till the grave has closed over one or both of us."

"No, he has not been murdered," said Sir Andrew Stalbrooke. "Moderate your passion, my dear sir, and

strive to calm your grief. He has fallen in fair combat, as I understand, which he required himself, and has not been murdered."

"He has been murdered, I tell you!" exclaimed Mr. Forrest, more furiously than before; "and do you think I do not know who has done it? Your nephew, sir, your base nephew, sir, for the love of that pitiful girl, my daughter, has taken the life of him who was worth a hundred such. But I will pursue him to the grave. I will get up this moment;" and, putting forth his hand, he rang the bell furiously.

"Indeed, Mr. Forrest," said Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, "you are not fit for what you wish to attempt; and you are entirely and totally deceiving yourself with regard to the cause of your nephew's death."

"Did he not do it, sir?" exclaimed Mr. Forrest, in the same vehement tone; "I ask you, did he not do it?"

"My nephew," replied Sir Andrew, purposely avoiding the point, "had no quarrel whatsoever with yours concerning your daughter. Your nephew himself insisted on the combat, and the cause was anything but Miss Forrest."

"She was the cause, sir, she was the cause, whatever was the pretext," exclaimed her father, vehemently. "But I will be revenged, I will be revenged. Archer," he continned to his servant, who entered the room, "Archer, give me my clothes directly, and help me to rise. Order the horses to be put to the carriage. Have all the things packed up. I will go to Lady Mallory's this moment. Give me a mourning suit, Archer, give me a mourning suit."

"Indeed, this is pure madness, Mr. Forrest," said Sir Andrew; "you are in no condition to make this exertion. You cannot, and you ought not, to think of stirring from your bed for four or five days to come."

"What, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Forrest, "shall I stay in the same house with the murderer of my nephew! Shall I dwell under the same roof with him that has shed my kindred blood! No, sir! no! never! Mrs. Forrest and Miss Forrest may stay if they please, and be charming and agreeable to Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, and perhaps listen complacently to his gallant nephew, while he recites his deeds of valour; but I for one, sir will not remain an hour under the same roof with him."

"It is unnecessary that you should, my dear sir," replied Sir Andrew, "for my nephew, in accordance with my request and his own good feelings, has already taken his departure from my house, and is far upon his way to London."

"Indeed, sir! indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Forrest; and then again covering his eyes over with his hands, he remained for several minutes in deep thought, which Sir Andrew would not interrupt.

"Sir Andrew Stalbrooke," he continued, at length, "as you say that your nephew is gone, it is not necessary for me to urge my departure with the haste which I had first proposed to employ. But, nevertheless," he continued, while his tone grew gradually calm and even less bitter, "nevertheless, it is my determination to quit this day your hospitable roof, under which the two greatest misfortunes that have ever occurred to me in life have befallen me. Of course, Sir Andrew, the memories will be pleasant that I carry away with me. But as my resolutions are firmly taken never to cease or to abate my pursuit of the person who has committed this crime, you must yourself see that it would be better for me to go at once to Lady Mallory's house; and therefore, when the surgeon has been here and dressed my wounds, I shall beg permission to take my leave of you. In the mean time, if I might crave it, some of your many grooms or stable-boys—their name, I imagine, is Legion—would notify to Lady Mallory that I and my family are coming. This will be a piece of courtesy for which I shall thank you; and I will not detain you longer now, though I am afraid I must call your other guests from you in order to receive my directions concerning our farther journey."

"Of course, Mr. Forrest," replied Sir Andrew, "you must do as you please. Yet I do think it mere madness your setting out in your present condition, which must greatly aggravate your illness. If you choose to stay at Stalbrooke Castle, everything that I can do to make you comfortable shall be done; and my nephew will not think of setting his foot within these doors so long as you remain here. In regard to your seeking any vengeance against him, I believe and am sure that you will think better of it, especially when you have heard all the circumstances of the case, into which we will not enter at present. I feel fully convinced that

he would have done anything that a man of honour could do to avoid the encounter; and that in it he acted in such a manner as to merit no disapprobation."

"Sir," replied Mr. Forrest, bitterly, "there is a great difference between you and me. I have lost my nephew, you have preserved yours. Yours has killed mine. Mine has been killed by yours. My resolution on these points are not to be shaken. As soon as I am able, I quit your house, with many thanks for your hospitality, which has been, like the shelter of the nightshade, somewhat deadly."

"Such is my respect for grief, Mr. Forrest," replied Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, "that nothing you can say at the present moment will give me any offence. All I grieve for, all I deprecate, is your committing an action which is likely, deeply and seriously, to injure your own health. However," he added, seeing his auditor growing more and more impatient every moment, "do as you will; and immediately I will send off a servant to notify your purpose to Lady Mallory."

Thus saying, he rose and left him, hearing Mr. Forrest, as he went out, direct the servant to call Mrs. and Miss Forrest to his presence. They remained with him for about half an hour; and although, in the course of eighteen or nineteen years, he had almost exhausted everything cutting, harsh, unkind, or ungenerous that could be said or done, yet he found means to send them both away weeping.

The surgeon visited him next, looking into Sir Andrew Stalbrooke's library with a long and important face as he passed, to inform the worthy baronet that he had been ordered to attend the coroner's inquest upon the body of young Forrest. Perhaps he expected some directions or hints from the uncle of Captain Strafford. He received none, however, Sir Andrew merely saying, in a grave but kindly tone, "I shall most likely be present myself, my good friend, grieving most deeply that this has occurred to a wild young man, who might, perhaps, had he lived, have seen his errors."

With Mr. Forrest the surgeon reasoned and insisted in vain. Even the thought of risking life, which was a consideration somewhat terrible to Mr. Forrest, had no effect; and towards one o'clock that gentleman's carriage, with the four horses wherewith he had been travelling, was ready to set out for the Hall.

Mrs. Forrest had recovered her composure; and, long accustomed to suffering, and to see every short dream of even temporary happiness breaking like an idle bubble, she gave her hand with sad but uninterrupted tranquillity of demeanour to Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, who had come to the carriage, and wished him good-by with a thousand thanks for his courtesy and kindness.

Edith, however, felt very differently. She had indulged hopes, she had enjoyed a dream of brightness, of calm content, and love, and courtesy, and all the sweet sympathies and gentle feelings of happy domestic life. He that she loved, indeed, was not there to see her depart; but in his noble, kind-hearted, and generous uncle, it seemed as if she parted with him again; and when Sir Andrew pressed her hand affectionately in his, and gazed upon her with a look full of deep interest and tender thought, she could not command herself as she was wont, and once more she burst into tears.

Mr. Forrest, though supported by two of his servants, came forth with much greater strength and firmness than could have been expected; and on approaching the carriage, though he still held tight by one of the men's arms, he drew himself up straight, and then made Sir Andrew Stalbrooke a low bow.

"I am sorry, Sir Andrew," he said, looking to his wounded shoulder and arm, which were carefully bound up, "that one of my hands is, as you see, disabled, and the other," he added, looking at the hand by which he supported himself on the servant's arm, "and the other has, as you see, different work to do, so that I cannot shake hands with you with all the tenderness of these ladies, and thank you for the entertainment which we have received at your house."

Sir Andrew Stalbrooke bowed in return, saying, "That which is freely given demands no thanks." And Mr. Forrest, having taken his seat in the carriage, drove away.

CHAPTER XVII.

We must now pursue the course of Ralph Strafford, as he journeyed onward towards London. As may be well conceived, the thoughts which became his companions on the road were as dark and gloomy as they well could be.

It is not that the first onset of misfortune upon a young and unprepared mind inflicts merely the natural portion of pain which the events may reasonably cause, but it also, with the aid of imagination, so completely depresses and enfeebles, that all other things appear clad in the same gloomy hue, and every feeling of our breast seems to put on mourning for the death of our bright confidence in happiness.

Whichever way Ralph Strafford looked, the prospect was gloomy to his eyes. The past, however well his conduct might be justified, was painful to him; the future was full of dark anticipations; the present was filled with the pangs of parting, for an unlimited time, with those he loved best. Nor was there any prospect of active exertion before him, to excite hopes or even to distract his thoughts. He could have gone to the battle-field with pleasure; the active exertions of the camp even would have occupied his time and diverted his attention; but he had nothing before him now but to sit gloomily in the dark and smoky capital, which he detested, and to ponder over events but too certain, and griefs but too probable.

The light rain which had been falling when his journey commenced ceased after a time, but the clouds continued dull and heavy upon the sky. There were no bright lights and shades upon the landscape; the same monotonous gray mantle covered all things; and, leaning back in the carriage, he passed his time in thinking of Edith Forrest, and asking his own heart whether the dreams of meeting her again, and of yet being happy, were not all false. He saw nothing on the road as he went; he heeded no objects, he attended to no sound, till the stopping of the vehicle at the little inn by the roadside, from which we first commenced

our own journey through these volumes, roused him from his revery. The sudden cessation of motion is, perhaps, more startling than its commencement, and Strafford, lifting his head quickly, ordered fresh horses to be put on the carriage, and those of his uncle to be sent back. An unexpected delay, however, now occurred. No horses were to be found at the inn.

"Why, sir," replied the hostler, in answer to Strafford's half angry inquiry of what had become of the horses, and approaching with reverence the side of the well-known postchaise of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, "we never had but three pairs, and one of the brown ones has gone dead lame. The grays and the chestnuts have been had over to Lallington, for Mr. Waters and the coroner to go to the coroner's inquest at Stalbrooke."

Strafford shuddered, and closed his eyes at the painful images the man's reply called up. He recovered himself in a minute or two, however, and asked his uncle's coachman whether the horses would carry him to the next posthouse. It was certainly no very laborious task, for the distance was not more than ten miles, and twelve had been the extent of their journey already. Locomotion, however, in that part of the country, was in no very advanced stage as a practical science. The twelve miles already passed had occupied near two hours; and the driver, being Sir Andrew's under coachman, was, of course, more particular than his superior officer would have been. He would do anything on earth to please the captain, however, and therefore only begged for a short delay to give his horses a feed.

In about an hour more Strafford was again upon the road with his uncle's horses; but by this time it had passed the sultry hour of noon; the fat, bean-fed quadrupeds went more slowly than before; and the stage of calm though gloomy thought having passed from the young gentleman's mind, and given way to that of irritation, he became impatient at the tardiness of their progress, and watched their advance from the windows, almost inclined to fancy that the milestones were running on before him.

At length, when, at an advanced hour of the day, they were beginning to approach the next posthouse, and were certainly not at a greater distance than a mile and a half from it, Strafford thought he heard a halloo not

unlike that given by the happy huntsman who gets sight of a fox that has put the hounds at fault. On the left-hand side of the road, the country sloped up with various gentle acclivities, only broken by an occasional fence, towards a wood, crowning the high hills that lay between that spot and Stalbrooke, which hills, indeed, were the proximate cause of the high road winding about in the manner which we have previously described. It was from that side that the sound seemed to proceed; and well knowing that no hunting was then going on, Strafford turned his eyes thither in some surprise, and was more surprised still to see a horseman at full speed cross one of the neighbouring meadows, leap the fence without seeking for a gate, and then make straight for the point of the road nearest to the spot the carriage then had reached.

Seeing that the object of the cavalier in question was undoubtedly to come up with him, Strafford bade the coachman stop; and in a moment after, with his fine horse panting and in one lather of foam, our good friend Castle Ball rode up to the carriage, and, putting his head close to the window, he said, "Thank God I've overtaken you, captain; and I thought I should too, for I rode straight across country, and they've sent round by the lower road, which, though it be five miles shorter than this one, is different enough from the crow's flight too."

"But what is it, Ball?" said Strafford, not able to conceive the object of his coming in such haste. "My uncle, I hope, is well?"

"Oh, quite well, sir," replied Castle Ball, "only somewhat angry, as he well may be. But the matter is this, captain; you must not think of going on, for before you get to ——, the man they've sent on will be there before you, with the coroner's warrant to apprehend you."

"To apprehend me!" exclaimed Strafford. "Has the jury sat, then? and what verdict has it brought in?"

"Ay, captain, the jury have sat," answered Ball; "and Squire Waters, as he calls himself, though I remember him nothing better than a snivelling attorney's clerk, he was there, and made them do just what he liked. So they brought in a verdict of wilful murder against you."

"Good God!" exclaimed Strafford, the colour coming up warmly into his cheek; "what, in face of the evi-

dence that Meakes, and the servant, and all the rest of them could give!"

"They made a bad job of it altogether, sir," replied Castle Ball; "I have no time to tell you all about it, captain, and indeed would not if I had, for it makes me very angry, and Sir Andrew had better tell it all himself; but as for the coroner and Mr. Waters, they only examined the servant and the surgeon. The surgeon said that the man was dead, which they all saw quite well before; and the servant said that you had killed him without any provocation."

"A scoundrel!" exclaimed Strafford. "He knew the contrary, for he saw the unhappy man draw his sword upon me with his own eyes."

"Ay, he is a scoundrel, captain; but, nevertheless, the jury gave the verdict as they were told, and the coroner immediately sent off his warrant, having heard that you had gone towards London."

Strafford paused thoughtfully for a moment or two.

"I am very much obliged to you indeed, farmer," he said, "for making such exertion to give me a choice in this matter. However, the only thing for me to consider is whether I had better go on, and allow the officer to make his caption at the inn, or go back to Lallington, and surrender myself at once."

"Hang me if you shall do either, Master Strafford!" replied Castle Ball. "You don't consider, sir, what you are about. It is full six weeks to the next assizes, and you will have to lie there in prison, committed for murder, till they come on, when you are just as much guilty of murder as I am. Why should you put up with such a thing? No, no, sir! I'm not so clever as you about most things; but take my advice; get out of the carriage, and come along with me; I will pilot you through the country so that nobody shall find you. You can lie quiet in the neighbourhood for a day or two; you can give notice that you will appear to take your trial at the assizes, and that you are only keeping out of the way to avoid the county jail, and then there will be little or no inquiry about you. You can then very easily go either to London or anywhere else that you please, and be in liberty and in comfort, instead of being shut up in a close, nasty, unwholesome county prison for six weeks, which surely would be more than sufficient punishment

itself for having killed such a bit of vermin as that, even if he had not forced you to do it in your own defence."

The reasoning of Castle Ball went strongly in support of all these objections to imprisonment which a young, free spirit like that of Ralph Strafford naturally entertained. He had not the slightest idea of resisting the course of justice; and his first impulse, as we have shown, was to surrender himself at once. But the words of the honest farmer shook that determination, though it was so far what we may consider a rooted prejudice in his mind, to yield at once to the power of the law, that he hesitated much; and again, though in a fainter tone, expressed his purpose of going on.

Castle Ball, however, persisted with the sort of plain, downright good sense for which he was famous. "Look here now, captain," he said, "the law uses imprisonment to punish offenders, not to punish those who have committed no offence. If you know that you are innocent, then, as well as I do, it's very hard that you should be subjected to an imprisonment, perhaps for two or three months, which is the punishment they give to very serious and terrible crimes. If you intended to cheat the law, and run away, and not stand your trial, you might be blamed perhaps, even if you were innocent, for resisting the power of the law, which Heaven knows, captain, I wouldn't do myself on any account. But when you intend to submit to the law, there's no need of your putting yourself in a prison, which was only built for the purpose of keeping those safe and sure who were likely not to stand their trial."

"I believe you are right, Ball," replied Strafford, at length, as he thought of the disgrace of herding with felons, and lying in a prison for weeks, within a few brief miles of Edith Forrest; "I believe you are right, after all."

"Well, then, sir," rejoined Castle Ball, "there's no time to be lost; for, hearing that you had set off for London, they have sent folks after you in every direction, just as if you were a highwayman."

Again the colour mounted into Strafford's cheek. "This is too bad," he said; "my uncle could have told them that I went by his directions, without the slightest attempt to conceal my journey."

"Ay, sir," replied Castle Ball, "but this was Master Waters's day. Every dog will have his day, you know,

sir, and so that dirty dog had his this morning. But," he continued, putting his head completely into the carriage, and speaking in a low voice, while his eye turned towards Strafford's servant, who was standing near the wheel of the carriage, "can you trust your man, sir?"

"Oh, yes, perfectly," answered Strafford. "He has been abroad with me, and served with me. I can trust him quite surely."

"At all events," answered Castle Ball, "it will be as well not to let him know exactly which way you are going."

"And yet," continued Strafford, "by his means we may keep up some communication with the castle."

"Oh, easily, easily," answered Castle Ball; "just let me manage it. You follow the road that I shall tell you for half a mile, till you come to what they call the Fox Oak. But you know the Fox Oak, captain, where the great fox was killed nine years ago come the second of February. Stop there, and I will join you in ten minutes: and now seem to take for granted all that I say."

Strafford nodded his head, and began to descend from the carriage, while Castle Ball added, in a loud tone, as if answering a question, "Oh, certainly, sir, certainly; I'll lend you my horse with all my heart, and no man in England ever got on the outside of a better. Only, pray, sir, the first public house you come to, give him a couple of quarts of beer, and he'll take you on thirty miles farther without drawing a rein. There, my man," he continued to the servant, "strap on the captain's valise behind the saddle. You've got a strap somewhere about the carriage: now be quick. Hark ye, when you get back to the castle, if anybody wants to send a message or a letter to the captain, there shall be a boy waiting on the Plague road, at a mile and a quarter from Meakes's house, every day at eight in the morning. If they've got any letters to give, they must say to the boy, 'I've got barley;' and if they expect any back, they must say, 'Have you got oats?' You understand? If you don't buckle that tighter, the valise will be off. Now, captain, you had better spur on, and I suppose I shall hear from you to-morrow or the next day."

"At latest," replied Strafford, with a smile. "You

coachman, may turn your horses' heads, and, taking Wilson with you, drive back to Stalbrooke. Tell my uncle that I am quite well, but that I have found it necessary to quit the carriage, on account of the iniquitous verdict which the coroner's jury have given. Say, also, that it is by no means my intention to be long absent; but as I go solely for the purpose of avoiding an imprisonment of six weeks or two months, I shall surrender myself immediately the assizes begin, and shall write to the coroner to say so."

"Can't I go on, sir," said the coachman, "to rest and feed my horses?"

"That is precisely what you are not to do," replied Castle Ball, before Strafford could answer; "you will only give yourself three miles more road, and set a hue and cry on foot before it is needful."

"You will go back direct," added Strafford, turning to the coachman; "and both of you had better remember, that the less said upon any such subject as the present, the better."

Thus saying, he mounted Castle Ball's horse, and riding back for two or three hundred yards upon the road, entered a narrow shady lane which branched off to the left; while the coachman surlily turned his horses' heads back towards Stalbrooke, and Castle Ball himself opened one of the gates, and entered the field through which he had before come, as if for the purpose of retracing his steps.

Strafford in the mean time slackened his pace as soon as the windings of the lane concealed him from the high road. If we must say the truth, although the verdict of the coroner's jury, by stamping him even with a suspicion of having committed a deliberate act of homicide, was, of course, most painful to his feelings, yet the change of plans which it had induced was rather a relief to him than otherwise. Naturally of an adventurous disposition, active and eager in character, there was a degree of interest attached to the idea of baffling pursuers, and concealing himself till he thought fit to come forward and take his trial, which was a relief compared to the dull, monotonous anticipation of remaining in London till Mr. Forrest was well enough to quit Stalbrooke Castle. He should be near Edith too, he thought; he might, perhaps, even have opportunities of seeing her, of enjoying a few stolen mo-

ments of that society which had become to him the great charm of existence.

Then came up visionary hopes and plans for obtaining such interviews. He knew all the country well, every inch of the grounds about the castle. There was not an old oak tree, or a hollow elm, or the barky walls of a decayed beech; no thicket, no dell, no dingle, no ruined church or tower in the neighbourhood of Stalbrooke or Mallory, that might not afford him a hiding-place, from which he could watch his opportunity during any of Edith's solitary walks, and obtain a few bright moments of happiness unknown to the rest of the world, as it were treasures in the keeping of their own two hearts.

In short, as he rode on, hope, unextinguishable hope, that ever-burning light, the physical type of which the disciples of the eastern philosopher sought for in vain, now burned up more brightly in his bosom after having seemed wellnigh extinct; and though, like the dim haze that sometimes covers the summer sky, the memory of the awful events of the preceding night still cooled the brightness and diminished the ardour, yet he felt the sunshine to be again coming upon his heart, and that feeling was in itself a blessing. Oh the buoyant spirit of undecayed youth, how bright, how majestic, how godlike it is in its triumph over the first misfortunes that befall us! how quickly it crushes one serpent's head after another, and goes on unwearied, till the burning noon of life exhausts its powers, or the length of the day's course wearies the vigorous arm, or the still gaping jaws of the hydra beset it more and more rapidly, and the venom which it knew not was in the light wounds received in the combat, spreads its marble heaviness through the veins into the heart! It was surely to paint youth trampling on misfortune, that the ancient poets devised the allegory of Hercules and the Lernæan serpent!

As Ralph Strafford rode on, the face of nature, too, seemed to sympathize with the changes in his bosom. The dull gray veil that covered the sky grew mottled, like the feathers of a dove, then broke into detached masses; the wind sprang up and wafted those masses more rapidly over the heaven; sunshine, and cloud, and blue sky mingled together in a web of beauty, and running gleams of brightness poured in between, and

chased each other over hill, and plain, and forest, like the fancies of an imaginative heart casting dreams of brightness upon all they pass over in their rapid flight.

It was not long ere Strafford reached the old oak, where a fox of a peculiarly large size had been killed by the huntsmen of the neighbouring county in days when, to him, the deeds of the chase had been the remarkable epochs of a life yet void of adventure. The tree was raised upon a high bank, the side of which next to the lane presented a cliffy face, with a small acclivity of turf rising up to the base. Underneath this bank Strafford cast himself down, to wait for the coming of Castle Ball; but in a few minutes he was roused by the sound of a horse's feet, and hastened to turn the angle of the bank, in order to get behind some bushes and low trees. In a moment, however, the voice of the worthy farmer himself made itself heard, and, coming forth, Strafford found that Castle Ball had mounted himself by the aid of a friend's horse, and was ready to pursue his journey more rapidly than he had anticipated.

"I have been thinking, captain," he said, as soon as Strafford had remounted, "that it will be better for us to jog along on this side of the high road till we get to Murs hall, where there's the bridle way by the side of the stream, that will take us round to the woods above the common, where we can halt till night; at least you can. You know I've a little bit of a farm up there of my own; and there's the house not tenanted. You can stop while I go down and get the key, and then we must make you as comfortable as we can. It's about five miles from Stalbrooke, not more, and less than three from the hall; though, for that matter, I'm sure I don't see why you shouldn't go and lie hid at the hall itself, for right sure I am that the beautiful lady would be glad enough to see you."

"No, no, Ball," replied Strafford, "that cannot be. Your first proposal will do very well; but will there not be any danger in crossing the high road by Murs hall?"

"Oh, no!" replied the other, "the hullabaloo will be over by that time, and I will go first and make sure; and now, sir, I've got to do what I haven't had time to do yet, which is to thank you. I look upon it, do you see, as if you had got into this scrape somehow on my account, for you've got into it in defending a person

that's very dear to me; dearer to me, for that matter, than Castle Ball himself; I mean poor Miss Lucy Williams, the schoolmaster's daughter; and I don't scruple to say, captain, to you, what I dare say you guess well enough without my saying, that I'm in love with Lucy, ay, and I'll marry her, too, if all the mothers and grandmothers on the earth said I shouldn't; that's to say, if she'll have me; but I'm pretty sure of that. Why, I as good as promised it the day of the funeral, and then my mother went down and bullied her, poor thing: but I'll marry her all the sooner for that, see if I don't; for she's as good a girl and as pretty a girl as ever I saw; and her father was a very good sort of man too, only a little bit too learned and clever, which made him foolish; but that's like all clever people, you know, sir; for my part, I can scarcely tell the one from the other when they are apart, a fool from a clever man; only I've heard that the difference is, that the one does the foolish things, and the other says them. However, as to Lucy, that's no matter. She's not too clever for me, and she has a dear little affectionate heart, and I'll marry her as soon as she'll have me."

"I think you are quite right, Ball," replied Strafford; "from all I ever heard of her, she's as good a girl as ever lived; and from the spirit with which she treated that unhappy young man—"

"Ay, spirit enough she has," replied Ball, "but it's a different kind of spirit from my mother's, or that would never do. There's gentleness, and fun, and life in her spirit. It is not all dry devil like my mother's. However, I'm sure both Lucy and I have a great deal to thank you for, captain, for taking her part as you did, and risking your own life, and making yourself unhappy in this way."

"Oh, indeed, Ball, you have nothing to thank me for," replied Strafford. "I did not know it was Lucy when I galloped up."

"Ay, that does not matter, captain," answered Ball; "gratitude thinks of what's done, not of what it's done for. Besides, did not Madame Philippina tell me this very day, that, at the time her father died, you sent her down fifteen guineas for fear she should need it, and told Philippina to say that it came from Sir Andrew, because you knew she would not like to take it from a young gentleman."

"Why, I knew that very well, farmer," replied Strafford; "but, besides that, I knew that it was what my uncle would have liked to do, and that he would pay me again; so that it was he gave it in truth, and not I."

"Ay, that's very well, that's very well, captain, "answered Ball; "but we don't forget these things; and neither Lucy nor I will forget them, I'm sure."

"Well, Ball," answered Strafford, with a smile that was somewhat melancholy, and a sigh that was still more so, "you shall ask me to your wedding, and I will lead off the ball with your bride."

The farmer very willingly agreed, and in such conversation Strafford and he pursued their way till they reached Murs hall, where they passed the high road without seeing any living creature. Then taking their way under the high banks of a broad but shallow trout stream, they rode along under overhanging boughs and the bright berries of autumn, till, passing not far from the spot where Strafford had first met young Forrest, they came at length to a place where the stream wound through the heart of the deep wood which Castle Ball had talked of.

The cottage, with the twenty or thirty acres of meadow ground which the good farmer possessed in that neighbourhood, lay upon the edge of the wood, about half a mile from the stream; but while he went down to bring up the key and some provisions, Strafford chose to remain upon the banks of the water, gazing upon the clear and rippling current as it passed by him, and finding therein fanciful images of youth, and hope, and life, and all the gay and sparkling things that float by us in existence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Lady Mallory's bell rang early on the morning of that day, some of the events of which we have already noticed. Sleep had, indeed, visited her pillow, and had rested there deep and profound, for she had been exhausted by unusual fatigues after a severe illness, and still more wearied with the struggle of contending passions in her own bosom. But the balm bearer fled from

her couch as soon as the corporeal frame was sufficiently refreshed to leave the mind power to act; and with the first streaks of dawn she woke, and struck her watch to ascertain the hour. The house was all silent, and she knew it would remain so for some time; but her efforts to sleep again were vain, and she lay raising her beautiful head upon her hand and thinking over her fate. Hers was a heart neither naturally cold, nor selfish, nor unfeeling; on the contrary, it was full of warm sympathies and strong passions, ardent, even impetuous, but soft and kind, and womanly withal.

The heart alone, however, was not, or, rather, had not hitherto been, the ruling power. There was besides a strong, clear, commanding mind, bright in its internal and external perceptions, and firm to rule the household of her own bosom as well as that without. The mind had hitherto governed and directed the heart, though now the heart in turn, rising like a giant that had submitted but until its appointed hour, prepared to use its former master as a slave, and employ the mind and all its qualities as the instruments of its will.

She had married without love, thinking perhaps that gratitude was love, or would create it; but, though she soon discovered that such was not the case; though she had soon found that there was a want and a vacancy in her heart which no kindness on her husband's part could supply, the only effect had been to make her aware that such feelings were dangerous, and to cause her to summon up with power and resolution all the energy of her mind; to rule her conduct and even her thoughts; to crush regret and to fortify duty. She succeeded, and could say,

> "I firmly did fulfil
> My duties: a devoted wife
> With the stern step of vanquish'd will,
> Walking beneath the night of life."

And as love was denied to her in her wedded life, she excluded the very thought as an idle vision, though he who was of all best calculated to teach her what love is was daily by her side.

When the death of Lord Mallory broke the chain from off her heart, she had, as we have already seen, thrown wide the gates and let love enter. Once monarch of her bosom's throne, he proved himself a despot,

and avenged himself now by all he made her suffer. But still former thoughts would return; the principles which had ruled her through her previous life would make themselves heard; the better, the gentler, the nobler feelings of her heart struggled against the will of the new tyrant; and shrinking modesty, generous tenderness of others, the will to make great sacrifices to duty, all affected her in turn; and now, on this very morning, more than once, as she lay and pondered, all those feelings made her turn her fair face upon the pillow, to hide the blushes and the shame that there was no eye to see.

Still love was master, however: she had but to think of him she loved; she had but to think of him united to another, in order to banish every other thought and feeling from her heart. It is at such moments that every idle sophistry which we have heard and despised in hours of firmer mood; that every one of the silly, the vulgar, the dangerous axioms which are propagated by myriads in society, and pass current solely because they are frequently repeated, return to our minds, as if to enable the dominant passion within us to maintain its sway, and are then received as maxims of truth and wisdom, whereas before they have been scouted as falsehood and folly.

Lady Mallory thought of her right to dispute the heart of Strafford with Edith Forrest, and she argued herself into a belief that she had every right to use all means to triumph in that struggle. More than once she repeated, "All is fair in love!" and "I," she thought, "I love him so much more deeply than she does. Besides, I can bestow upon him at once wealth and high station, and need not doom him to the misery of long expectation, of difficulties, and doubts, and contention with opposition for my sake. It were far happier for him that it should be as I wish; and on her part the will of her father, his strong opposition to her marriage with Strafford, and the probability that he will never grant his consent, will ultimately render it happier for herself also that she should be united to some one else."

Let us not be told that this was sophistry; let us not be told that there was no one argument to be found therein in favour of the course that Lady Mallory was inclined to pursue. Sophistry, far weaker and more idle than this, urged in favour of our own wishes and de

sires, has guided, still guides, and will guide, minds as strong, hearts as firm, and beings less moved by passion than Lady Mallory. She yielded to those arguments; she might suspect that they were false, but she *would* not prove them so. She might feel shame at her own wishes; but love and passion were stronger than either shame or reason, and her musing still ended by her thoughts turning to inquire how she might best accomplish the purpose which she had at heart. Already, as we have shown, she had taken many steps towards that object, but she felt that her best security would be to have Edith Forrest in her own house and under her own eye.

It was true, that in many respects and at many times, the very fact of her being there would be a torture to Lady Mallory's own heart. Not knowing the circumstances which had since occurred, she had many painful tasks to contemplate. She had promised to aid the views of Strafford in regard to Edith. She could not exclude him from her while Edith was there; she could not shut him out from her society. She would have to see him converse with her, and to gather, with the keen eye of jealousy, from every little sign, and word, and look, the movements of that affection between those two which was her curse.

Lady Mallory knew that all this must be so; and, well acquainted with the strong emotions of her own heart, she knew what agony it would be to see and suffer it. But yet it was the best, the only sure means of obtaining what she sought, of rendering the obstacles between Edith and her lover insurmountable; and she laid out a thousand schemes for gradually weaning their affection from each other; and fancying, fondly fancying, that Strafford's love for Edith was but a youthful caprice which would pass away, she dreamed bright dreams of inspiring him with a passion higher, stronger, more ardent, more durable.

To many minds passion might have suggested other means of detaching Strafford from Edith; means of a very different hue and character from those which were entertained by Lady Mallory. There might be persons who, circumstanced as she was, full of such strong feelings and bent upon such purposes, would have hesitated at nothing that did not imply danger to themselves; who would have striven to injure Edith in his opinion,

by sneers, or insinuations, or calumny; who would have painted her in despisable colours, or pointed at her the keen sneer, or the smile of contempt, which may excite anger at the moment, but too often is remembered at an after period, deadening both confidence and admiration. But Lady Mallory entertained not such purposes; she worked not by such means; she would have scorned herself could she have uttered one word against Edith Forrest. Rather, far rather, would she have risked anything that might have endangered herself; for, even though she stooped to use art, and lowered herself to deceit, there was a mingling of noble feeling still with all her plans and purposes, which assorted but ill, and formed a strange contrast, with the conduct which passion drove her to employ.

After having thus meditated for some hours, and inferred, by distant sounds about the house, that her domestics were risen, she rose and approached her dressing-table, where, amid all the various adjuncts of the toilet—simple and unaffected adjuncts, for Lady Mallory in her dress used no other art but that of an exquisite taste, employed nothing meretricious to add to her own exquisite beauty—lay, covered with rich crimson velvet, and clasped with antique silver, that holy book, to whose precepts we can never apply in vain for counsel or direction. She took it up, as had been her usual habit in the morning; she undid the silver clasps, but, as she did so, she fell into thought; her graceful head bent down over the book for a moment with a look of pain and shame. She then slowly fastened up the clasps again, laid down unread the volume that condemned her, and gave way to a few tears.

Pride came to the aid of passion; "I am weak," she said at length; "I am weak, and what the poet calls 'infirm of purpose;'" and, rising from her chair, she rang her bell.

One half of human life is made up of wasted consideration. The highways of the world are strewed with the sand of thoughts cast away. The events over which we have no control affect our destiny a thousand fold more than the few that we can govern; and while we ponder over our decision, fate decides for us, and the game is played.

Lady Mallory's maid entered her mistress's room with a face of wonder and importance; but the wonder

had nothing to do with her mistress's ringing her bell at so early an hour in the morning, and was intended, in fact, less as an expression of her own feelings than as a stimulant to curiosity on the part of her mistress. It was without effect, however, for Lady Mallory was wholly taken up with her own thoughts, and asked no questions, but simply seated herself in her chair for the maid to brush her beautiful long dark hair.

Reduced to speak without a question, she began by commenting upon her mistress's early rising. "I 'm afraid, my lady, you are doing too much," she said. "Here, yesterday, you were out quite early, and to-day you are up before eight o'clock, after having been so ill. Besides, my lady, I do wish you had lain in bed to-day, for there is bad news stirring."

"Bad news!" exclaimed Lady Mallory, turning full upon her. "What is it that you mean?"

The woman was very well inclined to be paraphrastic, and began her reply by beseeching her mistress not to agitate herself, which, with all the et ceteras thereunto attached, might have lasted for a considerable time, had not Lady Mallory exclaimed, with an eye, and brow, and tone which admitted no hesitation or delay, "I insist upon your answering me directly and at once. I know your folly, Margaret, in seeking to make much of a simple tale; but you must now speak instantly."

"Why, my lady," replied the woman, who saw that her mistress would not be trifled with, "the matter is soon told, at least as far as we know. The postboy, passing over from Stalbrooke, told Hollis at the park lodge that young Captain Strafford—"

"What of him?" exclaimed Lady Mallory, starting up and turning very pale, while a sudden feeling at her heart—a fear, as it were, of retribution—made her apprehend that the object for which she was prepared to struggle with poor Edith Forrest had been snatched from them both. "What of him? what of Captain Strafford, Margaret?" she exclaimed, forgetting, in the emotion of the moment, that calmness which veiled her feelings from the eyes of those around her.

"Oh, madam, he is quite safe," replied the maid, quickly, in possession from that very moment of her mistress's secret; "but it seems that, after he left your ladyship last night, he went straight to the common to fight a duel with a young gentleman named Forrest;

and, as might well be with such a brave and fine young officer as the captain, this Mr. Forrest was killed on the spot."

Strange and extraordinary were the feelings which took possession of the bosom of Lady Mallory. Awe certainly was predominant; and grief also had its share, for she thought not so much of young Forrest, of whom she knew nothing—except that he was a wild, unprincipled youth—as of his uncle, her own cousin, for whose deep grief and for the profound affliction into which she knew such a loss would cast him, she was really grieved and afflicted.

But through it all, in spite of awe, in spite of grief, there were feelings of hope and of satisfaction in her heart. A momentary sense of shame crossed her mind for entertaining them; but they were the natural emotions of her thoughts and circumstances, and the shame soon passed away. The whole, however, agitated her much, made her heart beat fast, and her brain reel; and after fixing her eyes long and earnestly on the maid's face, as if she would fain have asked her again and again, Is it, can it be true? she waved her hand, saying, "Leave me, leave me; I will ring for you in a few minutes."

The woman obeyed with some surprise; and the moment she was gone, Lady Mallory cast herself down again into the chair, hiding her face upon her hands. Again the struggling emotions of her heart were too much for her self-command, and once more she wept. But what were the words that broke from her lips? "It is spared me!" she said, "it is spared me! Deceit, and art, and degradation, and wrong, are all spared me! Fate has placed the irrevocable barrier between those two; fate has separated them for ever; fate has saved me from what I apprehended! Whether successful or unsuccessful, I never should have forgiven myself. It is not in the death of this wretched youth that I rejoice. It is not that Strafford has stained his hand with his blood; but it is that, without sacrificing that which I feel to be more, far more than life itself to me, I am spared all that was dark, and pitiful, and unworthy;" and casting herself down upon her knees by her bedside—now that the strong temptation to do wrong was taken away—she felt how wrongly she had

nearly been tempted to act, and poured out her prayers to God with penitence and remorse.

We may, perhaps, be painting a picture of human weakness; but where is the person who, if we could draw back the veil from his heart, as we now do from that of Lady Mallory—where is the person, we say, whose bosom would not present, when moved by passions like hers, weakness as great, variations of feeling as remarkable!

From her bedside she rose again, approached the dressing-table, took up the book which she had before laid down, unclasped the silver clasps, and read long in that part where the crowned prophet and poet of Israel bewailed his own errors before God, prayed for help and for support, and sung of his hope, and confidence, and rejoicing. When she had done, Lady Mallory could reclasp the book in peace, and lift up her eyes to heaven.

Calm and collected now, she once more summoned her maid, dressed slowly and thoughtfully, and descended to breakfast. Ere the meal was over, a messenger from Stalbrooke Castle brought her a note from Sir Andrew, informing her, in guarded terms, of the events which had taken place, of his nephew's departure for London, and Mr. Forrest's determination to leave the castle, even ill as he was, and to take up his abode with her at the Hall. Lady Mallory immediately gave orders that everything might be prepared for the reception of the party, and kindly and carefully superintended the whole arrangements herself.

Mallory Hall was one of those large old stone buildings having four faces, and a square court in the centre, through which, on two sides, was pierced an arched gateway, closed with an open gate of iron. The apartments usually inhabited by the lady herself looked down, as we have shown, upon the park, and upon a beautiful raised terrace, which commanded the view for many miles around. The opposite side to this comprised the offices and the principal servants' apartments. But of the other two sides, one was modern, or, rather, reconstructed in modern times, for the old style of architecture was preserved; the other was ancient, being left, in all its dispositions and arrangements, as it had been originally built.

That side commanded, like the one inhabited by Lady

Mallory, an extensive view over the park, but it was over the wilder parts. The modern side, in which were the great gates, looked down a long avenue of fine trees, leading to a lodge which opened on a road to London.

Although this modern side contained all those apartments which had generally been reserved for the most distinguished and noble visiters to the Hall, Lady Mallory, with kind consideration for her cousin's wounded state, and forethought for his convalescence, did not hesitate to order three or four of the best chambers it contained to be thrown open and prepared for him, as there were in it none of those small staircases and frequently recurring steps which, in the older part of the building, might have proved inconvenient. A cheerful bedroom, a dressing-room adjoining it, a servant's room adjoining the dressing-room, a handsome sitting-room when he should be well enough to rise, joining Mrs. Forrest's bedroom, dressing-room, and servant's room, were all prepared as quickly as possible, and every precaution was used to ensure that no damp had gathered there while they had been so long unoccupied.

For Edith, however, Lady Mallory caused to be prepared a chamber in that angle of the older part of the building which immediately communicated with her own apartments. Attached to this chamber, also, was a small dressing-room, to which it was necessary to mount by two or three steps, and a maid's room on the other side.

From feelings which may be easy to divine, but would be difficult to explain, Lady Mallory paid particular attention to the arrangement and decoration of Edith's apartments. She had flowers brought there from the greenhouse; she had a guitar, and some other instruments of music, placed therein. The old prints that hung upon the walls were removed and replaced by some fine and refreshing pictures; and a small, choice collection of books, with a number of objects of art—vases and bronzes, and well-chosen antiques—were scattered around, not without art, though apparently in some disarray.

Lady Mallory saw it done herself; and when it was done, and the rays of the sun, just breaking through the dim gray clouds that had hung in the morning over the sky, poured through the windows of the dressing-room

and down the low flight of steps, till they formed a lozenge of yellow light upon the floor of the bed-chamber, the lady stood for a moment contemplating the cheerful aspect of the apartment, and then turned away with a sigh, murmuring the words, "Poor thing!"

About half an hour after all had been completed, Lady Mallory saw the carriage of Mr. Forrest coming slowly on through the park; not up the avenue we have spoken of, but by the road on the other side which led to Stalbrooke. She watched it from her balcony till it came round, and then went down herself, to show the greater kindness and the readier welcome to her distressed guests.

All, of course, were grave and sad. Mr. Forrest had cast away the vehemence of his passion, and was now gloomy, stern, and silent. Carried up stairs by his own servants and those of Lady Mallory, for his temporary strength was exhausted, he was placed in bed, undressed, and made as comfortable as his circumstances would admit of. Mistress Forrest's demeanour could hardly be well graver or sadder than it usually was; but perhaps there might be now an additional shade upon it.

It was in Edith that grief and anxiety were chiefly apparent. The gay spirit that usually brightened her eye shone in them no more; they were not tearful, but they were full of thought, and that thought seemed all painful. To her Lady Mallory showed particular kindness and attention. Mistress Forrest that lady left with her servants in the apartments which had been prepared for her; but Edith she led to her chamber herself, with many kindly words and expressions of interest.

"I have made all the arrangements," she said, "Edith, to make you as cheerful and comfortable as you may be. Whenever you do not wish for society, here is your place of refuge. Whenever you do wish for it, you have nothing to do but to pass through these two anterooms to find yourself in my drawing-room. The library is below when you require other books, and my bedroom is just beyond the little drawing-room."

Edith answered her with thanks; but, while she did so, she gazed upon the beautiful being who spoke to her with eyes of curious inquiry; and though she did not divine the whole, or nearly the whole, she still divined a part. Lady Mallory and her young guest conversed for some time, till at length a servant came to say that

Mr. Forrest desired a few minutes' conversation with the lady of the house. She went to him immediately, and remained with him for nearly half an hour, after which she visited Mistress Forrest and Edith, and met them again at dinner.

The hours of the day slipped heavily by; and the news which reached the Hall from time to time, of the coroner's jury having returned a verdict, and what that verdict was; that Captain Strafford had not continued his journey to London, but had cut across the country, and gone no one knew whither, did not at all serve to make those hours pass less heavily or anxiously. They did pass, however, as hours, whether of pain or joy, will do, and night came on. Mr. Forrest himself showed an inclination for nothing but to be left utterly alone, or only with the tendance of his own servant; and after hearing a not unfavourable report of his health from the surgeon, who was forced to admit that neither the journey nor the excitement seemed to have done the patient any harm, Lady Mallory and her guests retired to rest, and silence resumed its reign over the Hall.

CHAPTER XIX.

Having followed out the events of that important day, in as far as they affected the fate of several of the principal characters in this tale, we must now turn to the proceedings of one for whom we have an especial veneration and regard, and give some account of the events which occurred to Sir Andrew Stalbrooke after he had parted with Mr. Forrest and his family.

As soon as he had seen the carriage roll away, the baronet took his hat and cane, and went out into the park.

"I will first go down," he thought, "and visit poor Lucy Williams; for this shameful assault upon her last night must have added terribly to all that the poor girl was suffering from the death of her father. I suppose I shall find her at Philippina's, for doubtless she would not like to trust herself alone in her father's solitary

house after all that has occurred. I can then learn when the inquest begins, and proceed accordingly."

In pursuance of these purposes, Sir Andrew Stalbrooke took his way through the green short turf of the park towards the gate which led out into the road leading to Philippina's cottage, and speedily reached her door. The neat maidservant opened it and admitted him; and entering the parlour, where the good German stood courtesying to the ground, Sir Andrew laid his hat and cane upon the table, and seated himself, giving a nod towards the opposite chair, as was always his custom; never suffering—although reverence towards the superior classes of society was at that time much more generally yielded and received than at present—any of his dependants, tenantry, cottagers, or even labourers, to remain standing when he visited them in their own houses.

Philippina knew her old master well, and, of course, gave in to all his habits; but upon the present occasion there was a degree of flutter, and anxiety, and agitation about the good German, which prevented her from obeying at once, and she remained standing, alternately gazing at Sir Andrew with a sort of thoughtful, agitated look, and then, when he remarked her, casting her round, bright black eyes down upon the ground, as if her master's glance affected her deeply and strangely.

"Sit down, Philippina, sit down," said Sir Andrew at length. "Is not poor Lucy Williams with you? You ought not to have let her go home till all this unfortunate business is at an end. The alarm she had last night in coming up to you must have agitated and terrified her very much."

"That it did, indeed, Sir Andrew," replied Philippina; "that it did, indeed. But she has not gone back to her own house. I advised her wonderfully to go up to her father's sister, who lives up at Harlaybourne, twenty miles beyond Lallington. She asked Lucy to come some time ago; and you see the poor girl was very sad and lonely, Sir Andrew, and her father's death had made the place seem quite desolate to her; and then I hear that Mrs. Ball, from the farm there, came down yesterday morning while the funeral was going on, and scolded poor Lucy like a fury."

"Scolded her!" exclaimed Sir Andrew. "Pray what for?"

"Why, because she thinks her son, Castle Ball, is going to marry her," replied Philippina. "But it isn't that so much, Sir Andrew; but poor Lucy pines after her father so. So I thought it would be better for her to be away and busy about other things for the present."

"I think so too, Philippina; I think so too," replied Sir Andrew. "In those terrible bereavements which we must all suffer, and I have had my share, Philippina, as you well know—though I am but insufficiently grateful when I acknowledge that God has been most bountiful and lenient unto me—but in those bereavements, I believe that nothing is beneficial to us till we do leave the spot where associations are constantly reminding us of our losses."

While Sir Andrew was speaking, Philippina cast down her eyes again, and the colour came and went in her brown and shrivelled cheek as if she had been a village girl listening to the first love tale. Sir Andrew, however, went on after a moment, saying, "I have heard, by-the-way, Philippina, that Castle Ball, who is as good a creature as ever breathed, has been long attached to poor Lucy; and if it be but his mother that stands in the way, we must try and tame down the good dame's termagant spirit. I have always foreseen that the time would come when I should have to do something for poor Williams's child. I thought, about ten years ago, of increasing his salary by ten or twelve pounds a year; but though so good a creature, he was so careless, that I saw it would be of no service to him, and I laid by the money, therefore, yearly, in case he either fell into ill health or distress, or that his child should be left portionless. Thus, in fact, there is a little fortune for Lucy, which will, most likely, make a difference in Mrs. Ball's opinion."

"That is all she wants, that is all she wants, sir," cried Philippina, eagerly; "and I'm very sure that Castle Ball has made up his mind to marrry Lucy, whether his mother likes it or not. He called in here just a few minutes ago, thinking to see her as he went down to the inquest."

"What!" exclaimed Sir Andrew, "has the coroner come over?"

"Oh yes, some time ago," replied Philippina; "and the jury is sitting. The people were wondering that you had not come down."

"I did not come down," replied Sir Andrew, rising and taking up his hat and cane, "because no intimation was given to me that the jury had even been summoned, which was rather uncourteous, considering all the circumstances of the case. But I must go down at once; for although there can be no doubt of what verdict the jury must give, yet it may be as well for me to be present."

Thus saying, he left her, and walked rapidly down to the village of Stalbrooke, where, passing through a crowd assembled round the door of the village public-house, Sir Andrew entered the front room where the jury were assembled.

A strong odour of compressed human beings, together with much perfume of long-smoked tobacco, and a smell of beer, rendered the atmosphere of the room by no means agreeable; and the number of persons that it contained, with the number of voices speaking at once, with some screaming at the highest pitch, some droning to one another in an under tone, made the room not more agreeable to the ear than it was to the nose.

The crowd which filled the bottom of the room, and which consisted of persons from Stalbrooke, Mallory, Lallington, and the neighbouring districts, immediately made way for Sir Andrew to pass, and he approached the long club-table, round the farther end of which the jury were seated.

In gazing over the fat, dull, unmeaning countenances of the body thus assembled to perform one of the most important civil duties of Englishmen, Sir Andrew perceived not one face with which he was in the slightest degree acquainted, with the exception of that of the coroner, and of a keen-looking, ferret-faced, large-stomached man of the name of Waters, who exercised in the town of Lallington the two incongruous, and what ought to be incompatible, offices of attorney and justice of the peace.

It surprised Sir Andrew not a little to see Mr. Waters there; but it surprised him still more to perceive that, among the jury, there was not one single individual chosen from among the respectable tradesmen of Lallington, nor one from among the tradesmen and farmers in the immediate neighbourhood of Stalbrooke. This struck him as both odd and suspicious, and he determined, in consequence, to watch the proceedings with the utmost care and attention.

The coroner and Mr. Waters rose and bowed to Sir Andrew on his appearance at the end of the table; and the jury rose, but did not bow; while Sir Andrew returned the salutation of those he knew; and in answer to the request of the coroner that he would sit down, declined, saying "that he regarded it as much better that nobody should sit at that table but the jury." The next moment, however, he added,

"But I beg your pardon, Mr. Coroner, if I am mistaken; but it seems to me, or I count wrongly, that the jury is already composed of one more than the right number."

"Oh, I am not one of the jury, Sir Andrew," replied Mr. Waters, starting up; "I only came over with my friend and relative the coroner, here, and was listening to the proceedings. But I will not sit down if you object to it, if there is any standing order, or order for my standing, ha, ha, ha!" and he laughed with a broad, indecent laugh.

"I do not in the least object to your sitting, sir," replied Sir Andrew, gravely; "I shall stand myself, as I am not tired, and think it best; but do not let me at all interrupt the proceedings."

"Why, Sir Andrew," said the coroner, after casting a look towards Waters, "as far as I can judge, there are no great proceedings to take place. The matter seems to me as clear as possible, and the jury can but decide in one way."

Although this speech might be construed very favourably in regard to Ralph Strafford, yet there was something in the tone of the coroner, a certain degree of supercilious doggedness, in fact—while Mr. Waters turned round with an indifferent air, and looked at a vile print of a foxhunt which hung upon the wall—that made Sir Andrew Stalbrooke not quite certain of the crown officer's meaning. But, at all events, as a magistrate, and a man not ill-versed in the laws of his country, he saw that the proceeding, whether it tended to favour Strafford or not, was altogether irregular and unjust.

"You will pardon me, Mr. Coroner," he said, "if I protest against your thus taking upon you to decide for the jury. I take it for granted, as a matter of course, that the verdict which you think the jury should come to is one of chance medley or justifiable homicide. But notwithstanding that, as my nephew is unfortunate-

ly implicated in this business, I, on his part, must beg to say, that he is desirous of the whole being clearly and fully investigated, and not passed over in this hurried manner, in less than a quarter of an hour."

"I must beg your pardon in turn, Sir Andrew," said Mr. Waters, interfering; "it is you who are dictating their verdict to the jury, by putting such an interpretation upon the coroner's words. Nothing, I am sure, could be farther from his thoughts than such a verdict."

"Mr. Waters," replied Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, "as it is known to yourself, and, I dare say, to every one here, that I have unfortunately been compelled to differ with you upon several questions of right and wrong, to complain of you to the late Lord Mallory, and to induce him to admonish you, as his agent, upon parts of your conduct; and as I also made a strong remonstrance in regard to your being put in the commission of the peace, I think it will be but decent and courteous on the part of both of us to abstain from making any remarks to each other in a business where I am concerned as representing my nephew, and you are not concerned in any shape or any way whatsoever."

"I beg pardon, Sir Andrew," said the fine, manly voice of Castle Ball, stepping forward from among the crowd behind; "but I must tell you that this Master Waters here has been more the coroner than the coroner himself. Ay, and to boot, they have taken good care to examine witnesses on one side—the surgeon who proves that the man's as dead as a herring, which every one knew before, and the young scoundrel's servant, who swears, till he's black in the face, that the fault was the captain's, and Hollis, and the other man who helped to bring down the body; but they've examined nobody else to prove what the fellow was about when he and the captain fought."

The coroner had turned a little white at these home truths, and his lip quivered to reply; but Waters, who had grown as red as fire, answered almost at the same time, shaking his fist at Castle Ball, and exclaiming,

"I shall remember you, sir, I shall remember you. The time will come, and I shall remember you."

"I'll make you remember me," answered Castle Ball sturdily, "the first time I catch hold of you; see if I don't give you something to remember."

But the coroner loudly commanded order, and then

said, addressing Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, "In answer to your observations, sir, I have merely to say that we have taken all the evidence that is offered. We have viewed the body and heard the witnesses; and though I don't scruple to say myself that I look upon this as a case of wilful murder, yet I do not pretend to decide for the jury at all."

"Sir, your conduct is very reprehensible," said Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, with calm dignity, "and, whatever be the result, shall not pass without notice; but, to avoid all useless discussion, there is more evidence, which must and shall be taken. By the statement of my nephew, he was riding calmly over from Mallory Hall to my house, when, hearing the screams of a female, he rode up, and saved from the base aggressions of the unfortunate young man who has met with his death, a virtuous, excellent, and well-educated girl; and in the affray subsequent to this transaction, the unhappy cause of this inquest took place; there was, therefore, no malice aforethought in the business. In the next place, there were three men, who, coming up at the same time as my nephew, were engaged in rescuing the young person I have mentioned, one of whom was her uncle Meakes, at the common. These three men, it seems, watched the proceedings of John Forrest, and can prove that he was engaged in a systematic and previously arranged scheme for violating the laws of the land in the most shameful manner at the time that he met with his death. There were also two other men with Mr. Forrest himself, and a postchaise, with a postillion, it is understood, from Lallington. All these persons, I must contend, should be examined before you, and state their whole knowledge of the facts, in order that the jury may come to a just conclusion."

The coroner looked up to Waters, who whispered something quickly in his ear, and he then replied, "It seems to me, sir, that all the points you have stated are much more fit to be investigated at the assizes than before a coroner's inquest. However, if it will give you any satisfaction, I have not the slightest objection to examine the man Meakes and the other two who were with him, and the girl, or young lady, or whatever she may be, if you will have the goodness to produce them."

There was a significant grin upon Waters's counte-

nance, which was immeditaely interpreted by Castle Ball.

"Ay, you may laugh, Master Waters," he said aloud, "for you know deused well that Meakes is not to be found, and that Miss Lucy is far away by this time. You may laugh, but you'll get pinched for it some of these days."

"Hush, hush, Ball," said Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, turning to him; "you are too vehement, my good friend."

"Well, well, sir," answered Castle Ball, in a respectful tone, "I will say no more;" and stooping down, he whispered to a little boy, "Run up to the farm, there's a good boy, and have my bay hunter saddled and brought down to the end of the village as quick as possible."

In the mean time Sir Andrew Stalbrooke began to make inquiries among the peasantry for the purpose of discovering where Meakes was to be found; but all agreed that, though they had been up seeking him, and the two men named Jim and Stoner, the poachers who were with him, they could discover no trace of any of them. There was a report abroad, indeed, but where it originated could not be traced, that Meakes and his companions had been apprehended for some offence against the game laws. Sir Andrew, however, as he could not prove it, did not like to assert the fact; and knowing that Lucy was absent, and Meakes not to be found, he addressed the coroner, demanding that the inquest should be adjourned for one or two days, in order that the important evidence which was now wanting might be procured.

"It is always customary in such instances," he said, "so to act, in order to save all the inconveniences which may arise from a hasty decision."

The coroner replied, after another brief conference with Mr. Waters, "I cannot think, Sir Andrew, of adjourning the inquest. I have already expressed my opinion, Sir Andrew, that the evidence which you propose to bring forward is better suited to the assizes than this occasion, and therefore—"

"Here's Madame Philippina," cried a voice from the door; "here's Madame Philippina, ready to tell all that Miss Lucy told her last night."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Waters, in a rude tone, "send her away! All that she has to give is hearsay evidence. It cannot be received here. If I were the coroner I should proceed."

"Such is my intention," replied the coroner. "If you have no farther evidence, Sir Andrew, I must call upon the jury for their verdict."

"You will do so at your peril, sir," said Sir Andrew Stalbrooke. "I call upon you, in strict and formal terms, to adjourn the inquest for one, if not for two days, that the necessary evidence of those who were on the spot when the young man came by his death, may be obtained; and I call upon everybody here present to witness the manner in which this investigation has been conducted, which I do not scruple to call the most shameful I ever yet beheld."

"Sir Andrew Stalbrooke! Sir Andrew Stalbrooke!" cried the coroner, furiously, "do you mean to insult the officer of the crown in his own court?"

"Far from it, sir," replied Sir Andrew Stalbrooke; "I only mean to make that protest against your proceedings, sir, which I shall substantiate in another place; and to call upon these worthy yeomen here present, you, Castle Ball, you, Hardacre, you, Miles, you, Anthony, and others, to witness my demand for an adjournment, and recollect the acts and words of the coroner, and of the somewhat mistaken legal adviser he has brought with him. And now, gentlemen, proceed if you like; but it is at your peril!"

Thus saying, Sir Andrew Stalbrooke turned and left the court.

END OF VOL. I.